

The Resurrection

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The New Testament is replete with material concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, from passing references to the grand event in the context of other concerns, to more developed discussions of its implications in the lives of the faithful, to accounts of appearances of the resurrected Jesus Christ. A closer look at material concerning the Resurrection in the New Testament shows that the authors agree on the reality and importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it also shows that they share the “good news” (i.e., gospel) of the Resurrection in distinct ways in order to emphasize various aspects of it.

The Resurrection in the New Testament Epistles

It is appropriate to begin this exploration with the Epistles since most of them were probably written before most of the Gospels. The Resurrection is mentioned with some frequency in the Epistles, and these references seem to fall into three categories.

First, some references are so brief as to seem to be made almost in passing, but they nonetheless make clear that belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the core of the gospel message. For example, the closing lines of the Epistle to the Hebrews mention incidentally that God raised Jesus from the dead: “Now [may] the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will” (Hebrews 13:20–21).¹ While these references do not shine much additional light on the nature or meaning of the

Resurrection, they do clearly show that the Resurrection was important to the writer and that its reality was accepted by the author (and presumably by the audience) without the need for extensive defense or explanation.

A second category of references uses the idea of the Resurrection as a reality that should shape the behavior of the writer and the audience but without engaging in the details of the history or doctrine of the Resurrection itself. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 Paul tries to persuade his audience of the evils of sexual immorality. After anticipating and responding to justifications one might make in defense of licentiousness (6:12–14), Paul writes that “God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power” by way of introducing his own argument, which is that since “your bodies are the members of Christ,” violations of the law of chastity would symbolically constitute involving the entire community in unrighteousness. Paul concludes that the fact of the Resurrection means that one should “glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” In this instance Paul is not concerned with the history of the Resurrection nor with a deep doctrinal exploration of it, but rather with the simple fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as a prod to righteous behavior. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 4:7–18 Paul describes the extensive challenges he faces and then explains he is able to persevere in faith because he knows that “he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus” (4:14). The reference to the Resurrection in this passage is a narrative turning point between Paul’s complaint of his difficulties (4:7–12) and an explanation of his ability to avoid despair (4:15–18). Once again, Paul does not explore the details of history or doctrine but rather relies on belief in the Resurrection to influence behavior.² A similar instance occurs in Romans 10:9 when Paul writes, “If thou shalt . . . believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved,” which, in its context, emphasizes that the root of belief in the gospel is belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The third and final category of resurrection references in the Epistles includes one longer passage, 1 Corinthians 15, that concerns the historical reality of the Resurrection and its theological implications. Paul begins by saying that he conveyed to the audience “first of all” (15:3) the message of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. In this context “first of all” signals the importance (not necessarily the chronology) of this message and so constitutes Paul’s belief in the prime relevance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In verse 4, when Paul mentions that Jesus “rose again,” the Greek text uses a perfect tense verb, which is a verb tense that implies that this action is not simply an event in the past, but rather that it has an ongoing impact on the present. Additionally, Paul describes Jesus’s return to life as “according to the scriptures,” conveying his belief that the scriptures contain prophecies of Jesus’s resurrection; here he may have specific passages in mind, or he may be alluding to a more universal sense in which the scriptures anticipate the Resurrection. Paul then describes resurrection appearances to Peter (KJV Cephas), the Twelve (this term would be understood as referring to the office, not the actual number, since the group would not have included Judas), five hundred people at once, James (the brother of Jesus), all of the apostles, and then to himself.

The reference to the fact that some of these witnesses were still living (15:6) constitutes a *de facto* invitation for Paul's audience to ask them about their witness of the resurrected Jesus. Scholars have long puzzled over why Paul's list of resurrection witnesses is not identical to those found in the Gospels, where Mary Magdalene alone (according to John 20:11) or with "the other Mary" (according to Matthew 28:1) or Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus (according to Luke 24:13) are the first to see the resurrected Jesus. One possibility for reconciling these texts is that Paul was simply unaware of these other resurrection appearances. A second possibility is that Paul (or his source of information) ignores the appearances to women since women's testimony was largely disregarded in the ancient world. Regardless of which explanation is better, the rhetorical effect of 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 is to emphasize the reality of the Resurrection and the role of eyewitnesses—points on which the other New Testament writers would wholeheartedly agree.

In 1 Corinthians 15:12–34, Paul shifts to address those in his audience who do not believe the dead can be resurrected. Here Paul does not equivocate but explains that if there is no resurrection, "then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" and he would then be a "false witness." Ironically, the heretical beliefs of his audience provide Paul with a prime opportunity to emphasize the reality of the resurrection of the dead and, in particular, Jesus's resurrection. In 15:20 Paul considers Jesus's resurrection in the perspective of the grand sweep of history, from Adam (whose death is inverted in Christ's resurrection) to the end of time (when the last enemy, death, is subjugated). In these verses Paul once again makes clear the importance of the Resurrection, this time as the pivot point of history. Next comes the part of the passage most familiar to Latter-day Saint readers: the reference to baptism for the dead. In these verses (15:29–34) Paul returns to the earlier discussion of the reality of the Resurrection—*contra* those who argue against it—here pointing out that the practice of baptism for the dead (which they apparently do not object to) makes sense only if there is in fact a resurrection.

Verse 35 signals another shift, this time to details of the Resurrection based on the concerns of Paul's audience regarding resurrected bodies: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" These questions probably reflect doubt that a physical resurrection can occur after a body has decomposed. Paul's answer begins with an analogy to a seed, implying that just as a seed is different from a plant, the resurrected body is different from a mortal body. Paul is perhaps relying on the "ancient idea that a seed put into the ground dies and is brought to life again miraculously as a plant"³; the fact that it is not biologically accurate to describe seeds as "dying" does not undermine Paul's analogy. The point is simply that the resurrected body is different from the mortal body, and thus the decay of the mortal body is not an obstacle to resurrection. As Paul explains in verse 53: "this corruptible [body] must put on incorruption, and this mortal [body] must put on immortality." In other words, the nature of resurrected bodies is sufficiently different from mortal bodies that the natural decay of the mortal body does not present an obstacle to resurrection. The passage concludes with Paul proclaiming that the Resurrection is a victory over death.

To summarize, the material concerning the Resurrection in the Epistles suggests that this event was key to the early Christians. They rarely felt the need (at least in the Epistles as we have them) to expound on the details of the Resurrection. The one exception to this is 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul addresses those who are concerned that the decay that accompanies death would make resurrection impossible. Paul assures his audience, through a variety of arguments, that the natural processes that follow death will not prevent resurrection.

The Resurrection in the Gospel of Mark

Close attention will be paid to the Gospel of Mark since it is the earliest canonical account of the life of Jesus Christ. Because Mark is, fundamentally, a *story*, teachings about the Resurrection often come through the narrative instead of through didactic statements. For example, Jesus's resurrection is foreshadowed in the story of the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:21–24, 35–43), with which it has obvious thematic similarities as well as some verbal similarities. These similarities emphasize the reality of the power to raise the dead as well as the stunned reaction of onlookers; they also prepare the audience to understand the reality of Jesus's resurrection at the end of the Gospel. Mark's audience would likely have approached the story of Jesus's death with the story of the raising of Jairus's daughter in mind and thus found hope even during the story's darkest moments. Likewise, Mark's story of the Transfiguration has many parallels with the Resurrection, most notably the glorified presence of Jesus. Because the text contains Jesus's admonition that the disciples are not to speak of the Transfiguration until after Jesus was raised from the dead (9:9), when the audience finally hears the story of the Transfiguration, they are implicitly learning that the Resurrection has in fact already happened—thus granting the disciples permission to speak of the Transfiguration. The presence of the story itself is thus a testimony of the reality of the Resurrection, and the content of the story, with its image of a glorified Jesus, is a hint at what that resurrection is like.

Another example of subtle teachings about the Resurrection embedded in the narrative of Mark occurs in 12:1–11, where Jesus shares a thinly veiled parable about wicked tenants: the death of the vineyard owner's son is vindicated (verses 10–11), anticipating Jesus's victory over death. Again, Mark's audience would have brought this hope of vindication with them to the story of Jesus's death and resurrection and thus been more likely to see the Resurrection as suggesting God's vindication of Jesus. There is one other brief reference to the coming resurrection in Mark: at the Last Supper, Jesus stated that after he is raised, he will go to Galilee (14:28). Most of the disciples did not understand the implications of Jesus's words, but Mark's audience learns that Jesus anticipated his death and resurrection. As was the case in the Epistles, these brief references do not develop the meaning or implications of the Resurrection but simply and powerfully attest to its reality.

Teachings about the Resurrection also come through several prophecies that Jesus made of his resurrection. The entire Gospel of Mark cleaves into three sections, and the structural backbone of the middle section (8:22–10:52) consists of three statements that Jesus makes

of his death and resurrection; these occur in 8:31, 9:30–32, and 10:32–34. When Jesus states that he will rise “after three days (8:31),” the phrase implies “on the fourth day.” Mark will later describe Jesus’s rising as happening on the third day (16:1); the discrepancy may stem from the fact that in the Old Testament “three days” sometimes connotes an indeterminate but short amount of time, so it is possible that Jesus is speaking generally here and not specifically. There would then be some irony in the fact that Mark’s audience was likely aware that Jesus’s language was very close to being literally true with regard to how much time would elapse between his death and resurrection. It is also possible that his resurrection in fact occurred after three days when timed from his suffering and not from his death, as it is usually calculated. This approach may be of particular interest to Latter-day Saint readers, who emphasize Jesus’s suffering in Gethsemane as much as—if not more so than—his suffering on the cross. In all three of these prophecies, Jesus mentions his rising from the dead but does so with incredible brevity, adding only the detail of the timing.

As with the Epistles, it appears that the fact of the Resurrection takes priority above commentary on its details or implications. Each prediction that Jesus made of his suffering, death, and resurrection is immediately followed by a mistaken claim made by the disciples (8:32–33; 9:33–34; 10:35–37) that, in turn, is immediately followed by Jesus’s teachings about discipleship (8:34–9:1; 9:35–10:31; 10:38–45), and each of these discipleship teachings includes a paradoxical saying (8:35; 9:35; 10:43–44). This tight pattern suggests not only that these prophecies are important in their own right but also that they developed their meaning through this repetitive structure. Specifically, Jesus’s teachings about his death and resurrection lead to misunderstandings by his followers that he then clarifies. The pattern of showing evidence of the disciples’ misunderstanding immediately after each statement is extremely significant since it intertwines Jesus’s mission with the theme of discipleship. In other words, understanding Jesus’s identity is closely tied to behaving appropriately as disciples. The link between discipleship and prophecies also suggests that Jesus’s suffering and death is the automatic outgrowth of living a certain way; thus discipleship and suffering are linked. These predictions, then, are not just about Jesus’s identity but also about the identity of his disciples; the two are inseparably linked.

After each prophecy, Jesus addresses his disciples’ misunderstanding; these teachings always contain a paradox, as in Mark 8:35, 9:35, and 10:43–44. Jesus makes clear in each case that the teaching applies to everyone, not just to the disciples who are present. The pattern implies that discipleship necessarily involves paradoxical elements. It is precisely these paradoxes that Jesus’s disciples struggle to understand—they always favor one element of the paradox but cannot accept the other element.

While not concerned with Jesus’s resurrection in particular but with the concept of resurrection in general, Jesus’s conversation with the Sadducees in Mark 12:18–27 provides much insight into the topic of the Resurrection. In this encounter the Sadducees ask what will happen in the next life to a woman who had been married to seven men during her mortal life. Mark introduces the story by pointing out that the Sadducees “say there is no resurrection”; the inclusion of this detail indicates this is not a genuine question about marital

status in the afterlife but rather an attempt to embarrass Jesus by pointing out the supposedly absurd consequences of a belief in the Resurrection.⁴ What may strike Latter-day Saint readers as ironic about this incident is that the Sadducees seemingly assume that all marriages are eternal—Jesus does not. For our purposes, the key part of the passage occurs when Jesus tells the Sadducees they do not understand the scriptures or the power of God. At its most basic level, Jesus's statement means that resurrected life is different from earth life. Jesus states, "As touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err" (12:26–27). Jesus's response indicates he was well aware that the Sadducees' question was not really about marriage but rather about resurrection.

Jesus then quotes from Exodus 3:6, where God is self-identifying to Moses to prepare him to return to the people: "Moreover [the Lord] said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had no longer existed at the time this was spoken, then it would have made no sense for God to mention their names. The fact that God does use them leads to the conclusion that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must have existed after death (as Jesus explains in the next verse) and thus implies there must be a resurrection. So the continued existence of the patriarchs after their deaths negates the Sadducees' belief that there was no resurrection. Simply put, Jesus is using God's reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob after their deaths as evidence that those men continued to live on after their deaths. Jesus explains that, in a sense, there are no dead people: God can self-define in terms of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because they are still living. Significantly, Jesus's response to the Sadducees makes clear that this is not solely a dispute about one unusual (and perhaps hypothetical) case concerning a woman with seven husbands. To the extent that the Sadducees (or Mark's audience) understood that Jesus would die and be resurrected, it was important for Jesus to be able to defend the idea of resurrection; otherwise, his entire ministry would have been undermined. Thus what might initially seem like an implausible hypothetical situation was included in Mark's Gospel in order to provide Jesus with an opportunity to explain and defend the concept of resurrection in general and the possibility of his resurrection in particular.

The bulk of Mark's message about the Resurrection comes naturally in the narrative of Jesus's death and return to life. However, strong evidence suggests that the earliest versions of Mark's Gospel ended after 16:8, which means that there is no appearance of the resurrected Jesus in Mark's Gospel. This is not to imply that the resurrected Jesus did not appear to anyone but simply to suggest that that story did not appear in Mark's text. This may seem like the last story a writer would want to leave out of an account of Christ's life, but it is only by comparison with the other canonized Gospels that the lack of a resurrection appearance seems to be a problem: on its own Mark's Gospel has no inherent lack. Note that none of the canonized Gospels relate the actual Resurrection; they only tell of later appearances of the resurrected Jesus, and yet readers generally do not fault the Gospels for this lack.⁵ Further, it is possible that members of Mark's audience would not have expected a resurrection appear-

ance, but rather would have thought the empty-tomb scene adequately conveyed the reality of Jesus's resurrection, a rhetorical technique common in Hellenistic literature: "Indeed, it would have been the body's absence, not its presence, that would have signaled the provocative moment for the ancient reader."⁶ And if Mark's aim was to motivate the audience to continue to tell the unfinished story of Jesus, then that goal was clearly accomplished since all of the endings later added—in Mark 16:9–20, in Matthew, and in Luke—witness to the success of Mark's strategy of spurring others to, in effect, continue the story themselves. Given that the entire point of the scene at the tomb is that death is not the end, it makes sense that the text does not show the end of Jesus's mission on earth.

But Mark does contain a powerful witness to the reality of the Resurrection even without an appearance of the resurrected Jesus Christ. The young man whom the women find in the tomb functions literarily as a symbol of the Resurrection before he even opens his mouth: Mark's audience would almost certainly have associated this young man at the tomb with the young man who fled arrest in Gethsemane (Mark 14:51–52) since the same Greek word (*neaniskos*) is used for them both (but used nowhere else in Mark) and in both cases their clothing is described. The young man in Gethsemane was dressed in a linen cloth (the same Greek word describes Jesus's burial shroud as "*the* linen cloth," not "*a* linen cloth") and ran away—sans clothing—when the authorities attempted to arrest him. He was initially described as following Jesus, with an unusual prefix on the verb for "following." The only other use of that combination is in Mark 5:37, where the idea of being a close disciple is mentioned, so the young man is presented as a close follower of Jesus—at least before he flees. That flight is a picture of shame: the cloth suggests he showed up with the intent of dying with Jesus but, under pressure, preferred the humiliation of running away naked rather than the pain of death. Jesus is crucified without clothing, just as the young man runs away without clothing, implying that Jesus is symbolically taking the young man's shame upon himself. When the young man reappears at the tomb, he is now wearing clothing associated with honor and glory—clothing described as being like Jesus's clothing at the Transfiguration (these are the only two instances in Mark where clothing is described as being white) and with the young man assuming a position of authority. In other words, he not only has been restored from shame but is now assuming an even more honorable position. In effect, Jesus has swapped roles with this young man and thus made the young man's restoration and glorification possible. In this symbolic presentation, the meaning of Jesus's resurrection is made clear through its effect on this young disciple.

The subtle but clear implication is that Jesus's death and resurrection has made this change possible for the young man. This picture of a young man restored from shame to glory is a key component of the meaning and impact of the Resurrection in Mark's Gospel. The two scenes with the young man show the effect of the Resurrection on the life of the disciple: Jesus's suffering, death, and resurrection make it possible for this young man to escape the shame of failed discipleship and to take on the role of authoritative messenger. He is, through the transformation that has happened to him, the primary resurrection witness in Mark's Gospel. Part of the puzzle of Mark's enigmatic ending is solved when the young man

at the tomb is understood as a picture of the ideal disciple—failed, restored, glorified, and providing a template for the other disciples. In this light there is surely no lack—no sense of anything missing—from Mark’s Gospel, because the power of the Resurrection is displayed even without an appearance of the resurrected Jesus Christ to any of the disciples.

When the young man in the tomb speaks, it is to announce the reality of the Resurrection and to commission the women to tell the other disciples. These women are given a special task as agents who extend Jesus’s forgiveness and an invitation to follow him. Generally, women were not permitted to be witnesses under Jewish law, which means that in order for the disciples, Peter, and Mark’s audience to accept the invitation to follow Jesus, they need to disregard the cultural norm of distrusting women’s words. (In Luke’s Gospel the scandal of women as early witnesses to the Resurrection is made very clear when Luke reports the men’s reaction to the women’s announcement: “their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not,” Luke 24:11.) The final note of Mark’s Gospel, in contrast, is that one cannot be a follower of Jesus—indeed, one will not be given the opportunity to follow Jesus—if one is not willing to listen to women and believe their words.

While some have discounted the reliability of the account of the Resurrection, it is important to realize that *if* the early church were to concoct or expand on an account of the Resurrection, the last thing it would have done would be to make women the sole witnesses to the reality of the Resurrection in light of the enormous cultural bias against the reliability of women’s testimony. The fact that our earliest Gospel positions women as the only witnesses to the news of the Resurrection is, ironically, extremely strong evidence that the story happened as recounted in Mark.

In Mark’s account Peter is mentioned separately from the disciples in the young man’s charge (“tell his disciples and Peter,” 16:7), perhaps suggesting he is distanced from the other disciples by his denial of Jesus. However, the implication of the young man’s words is that Peter is invited to return to full fellowship by following Jesus to Galilee. Peter and the disciples who fled in fear are being given another chance to follow Jesus; it is evidence of mercy to specifically mention Peter and to make clear that the invitation applied to him as well, despite his earlier denial of Jesus. The promise of restoration to discipleship requires that the disciples act in faith by choosing to follow Jesus to Galilee. They are all expected to respond to the announcement of Jesus’s resurrection. Interestingly, the Gospel ends with Mark’s audience still in the tomb, left to contemplate, facing the reality that Jesus is no longer there. Those in Mark’s audience are invited to seek their own resurrection appearance by choosing to follow Jesus. In a broader perspective, the Resurrection in Mark also functions as a token of vindication. Jesus was misunderstood, mocked, and disregarded at every point during his mortal life, and death by crucifixion was a supreme humiliation. Yet the Resurrection signals God’s approval of Jesus’s entire mission as set forth in Mark.

The picture of the Resurrection in Mark 16 is, in sum, character-driven, not focused on theological explication. In the young man, the audience sees the potential for the Resurrection to exchange shame for glory not just in Jesus but also in his followers; in the female witnesses, the audience sees the need to listen to women as authorized messengers; in the

reference to Peter, the audience realizes that the resurrected Jesus is not going to turn his back even against one who turned against him.

The Resurrection in the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew follows Mark's outline rather closely (at least until after Mark 16:8, presumably because Mark ended at that point), so the material common to both Gospels will not be reiterated here. However, the differences contribute to a slightly different view of the Resurrection than that found in Mark's Gospel. For example, Matthew contains a scene absent in Mark that concerns the placing of guards at Jesus's tomb (Matthew 27:62–66); this scene would have further emphasized to Matthew's audience the reality of the Resurrection by allowing no opportunity for trickery on the part of Jesus's distraught disciples. Additionally, this story makes clear that Jesus's enemies understood and took seriously his prophecies that he would rise from the dead in a way that most of his disciples did not yet understand, which must have struck Matthew's audience as rather ironic. Further, the reference to the guards creates a five-part pattern in Matthew's text:⁷

1. Burial (27:57–61)
2. Placement of guards (27:62–66)
3. Women at the tomb (28:1–10)
4. Guards bribed (28:11–15)
5. Resurrection appearance (28:16–20)

This pattern echoes a similar five-part pattern in Matthew's account of Jesus's infancy (1:18–25; 2:1–12, 13–15, 16–18, 19–23), which also has positive material in the first, third, and fifth sections and negative stories in the second and fourth positions; it may also reflect the overarching structure of Matthew's Gospel, which presents five major discourses by Jesus (5–7; 10; 13; 18; 23–25)—each surrounded by narratives that enact the major themes of the discourse. These fivefold patterns may function to align Jesus with Moses (who was credited with writing the first five books of the Bible), but they also suggest that the material that is literally (and metaphorically) central to the resurrection story is not the appearance of the resurrected Jesus but rather the experience of the women at the tomb. Thus, there is more overlap with Mark's account—at least thematically—than one might initially suspect since both texts focus on the experience of the women at the tomb as central to the story of the Resurrection.

Matthew mentions an earthquake as the women approach the tomb (28:2); as a geographical sign at the scene of Jesus's resurrection, this earthquake parallels the star that the magi followed (2:2). Together these signs signify the cosmological importance of Jesus's life and death. To Matthew, Jesus's resurrection is literally earthshaking. Matthew's scene at the tomb is similar to Mark's; the real difference comes in Matthew's inclusion of a scene depicting the resurrected Jesus appearing to the women (28:9–10) and then to the eleven disciples (28:16–20). The reference to the women holding Jesus's feet conveys both the physical reality

of the Resurrection as well as their human affection for him. Perhaps most significant in the story of Jesus's appearance to the women is the note that they worshipped him; Matthew deftly conveys all that one would need to know about the status of the risen Jesus through the women's actions. As in Mark, the Resurrection vindicates Jesus's humiliating death.

Matthew also narrates the appearance of Jesus in Galilee, including the commission to preach the gospel to the world (Matthew 28:19–20). Jesus's words yield an interesting insight into the Resurrection via his statement "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Here the words translated as "I am" are the same Greek words found in the Septuagint version (the ancient translation of the Bible into Greek) of Exodus 3:14, where God uses them in response to Moses's question about what God's name is: "Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and . . . they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." It is significant that in this post-Resurrection appearance, Jesus is identifying himself with the God of the Old Testament. Yet the word order is skewed so that the text in Matthew reads literally "I with you am," emphasizing verbally the embeddedness of God with the people. Further, this passage forms a bookend with the material in the beginning of Matthew's Gospel where it was prophesied that Jesus's name would be "Emmanuel" (Matthew 1:23), which means "God with us." In sum, Matthew's scene emphasizes that the Resurrection makes it possible for Jesus to fulfill his mission as "God with us."

The Resurrection in the Gospel of Luke and in Acts

Luke's distinctive contribution to the story of the Resurrection is the narrative of the appearance of the risen Christ to two disciples on the road to Emmaus.⁸ This is a very different resurrection appearance than those included in the other Gospels, primarily because the disciples do not recognize Jesus until he is no longer with them. One fascinating aspect of this narrative is how it interweaves into the appearance references to the Last Supper, the importance of scripture, the lack of understanding of the disciples, the provision of hospitality to a stranger, and the fulfillment of prophecy and thus recapitulates the important elements of Jesus's ministry in miniature and in the context of his resurrection. There is something provocative about the disciples' inability to recognize Jesus at first, and his self-revelation to them in the breaking of the bread is similarly intriguing, pointing to the importance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for its ability to "reveal" the Lord to his followers. The story conveys metaphorically that the risen Jesus Christ will be known to (all of) his followers through scripture, through hospitality, and through the reenactment of the Last Supper. The story of the appearance of the resurrected Lord to the disciples on the road to Emmaus thus becomes a template for how all future followers of Jesus will commune with him.

Luke's Gospel also contains an appearance of the resurrected Jesus Christ to another group of disciples (Luke 24:36–53). In some ways it is similar to Matthew's account, but Luke uniquely emphasizes several principles. First, the lack of understanding on the part of

the disciples is emphasized (24:37). Additionally, the physical reality of the Resurrection is emphasized in Jesus's statement "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (24:39); Jesus also eats fish to confirm his corporality.⁹ Luke's story also emphasizes the role of scripture (24:44–46) and the continued role of the temple (24:53) in ways unique to this account.

Historically, Luke has been regarded as having a particular concern for female followers of Jesus. But, interestingly, women are not central to Luke's material on the Resurrection: they may not be entirely absent (assuming that they are included in the group mentioned in Luke 24:33 and particularly if Cleopas's companion is female), but their role is not highlighted. And yet Luke has implicitly criticized those who would disregard the truthfulness of women's testimony (24:11). It is difficult to determine what to make of this de-emphasis on women's roles as resurrection witnesses in Luke's account.

The companion account to Luke's Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, contains over a dozen references to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Most briefly emphasize the reality of the Resurrection and the frequency that the early Christians preached it without exploring details of its historical reality or theological implications. For example, in Peter's address on the day of Pentecost, he states that Jesus was raised up (Acts 2:24); the comment is brief and without historical or doctrinal elaboration, probably because the book of Acts positions itself as a historical record of the ministry of early church leaders, not as a detailed exploration of gospel doctrine. Nonetheless, the message is clear in Acts that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was absolutely central to early Christian belief and preaching. If there is one facet of the Resurrection that is emphasized in Acts, it is that Jesus was physically resurrected (see Acts 1:3; 2:31; 10:40–41); this meshes well with the material focusing on the physical reality of the Resurrection in Luke's Gospel discussed earlier in this chapter.

The Resurrection in the Gospel of John

One way in which John's account is different from the other Gospels is that Matthew, Mark, and Luke tend to emphasize that God raised Jesus from the dead (Mark 12:26; Luke 9:22), while John emphasizes that Jesus himself chose to lay down his life and take it up again (see John 10:17–18). Thus, Jesus's power is emphasized, and the Resurrection is positioned as something under his own control.

John presents miracles not as powerful acts (as the other Gospel writers do) but rather as signs, meaning there is a significant symbolic component to them. There are seven "signs" in John (note that John uses a different Greek term [*sēmeion*] than the other Gospel writers do to describe these miracles; John's usage emphasizes the symbolic connotations of the act while the other writers' term [*dunamis*] emphasizes the wondrous power of the act); the raising of Lazarus is the final sign. The sign inherent in the raising of Lazarus must surely include Jesus's power over life and death and is thus relevant to a discussion of the Resurrection. Interestingly, in John's text, Martha expresses solid faith in the Resurrection (John 11:24), but one that will occur "at the last day." Jesus responds that he is "the resurrection,

and the life” and thus stresses the immediacy of the potential for resurrection owing to his unique nature. Martha has a faith in the Resurrection that is generic and future-oriented; Jesus instructs her that the Resurrection is, in some unexplained way, personally tied to him and thus specific and immediate. The statement “I am the resurrection” (11:25) is stunning on its face, and its position as Jesus’s self-description in the middle of the seventh and climactic sign in John’s Gospel catapults it to an even greater importance. Clearly, John wants to convey to the audience that the Resurrection is a key aspect of Jesus’s mission and identity. Intriguingly, Jesus also weeps in this scene (11:35), creating a compelling portrait of Jesus as both extremely powerful and yet still responsive to human needs.

Earlier in the account of Lazarus’s return to life, Jesus had stated that Lazarus’s illness was not “unto death, but for the glory of God” (11:4). The audience has a moment of surprise—and perhaps worry—when Lazarus does in fact die; perhaps some wondered if Jesus were a false prophet. It is only the reality of Jesus’s power over life and death that can solve this problem at the heart of the story, and thus the audience realizes that it is Jesus’s power over death that shows “the glory of God.”

But there is another layer to the story as well: it is in direct response to the raising of Lazarus that leads the authorities to plot Jesus’s death (11:45–53). Thus, in terms of the narrative there is a very real sense in which Jesus trades his own life for Lazarus’s life (especially since John notes that Jesus waited for two days before going to Lazarus, 11:6); now Jesus’s comment about Lazarus’s illness being for “the glory of God” has an even deeper resonance.

John’s account of the Resurrection itself begins with Mary Magdalene at the entrance to Jesus’s tomb. The picture of a woman weeping over an unexpected death is not new to John’s audience: it would have recalled another Mary weeping at the death of Lazarus. The audience is thus primed to anticipate Jesus’s resurrection. A great deal of the power of this account comes from one unusual detail: John 20:12 states that, as Mary looked into the tomb, she saw “two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.” Jesus’s body is, of course, gone. The angels are sitting (a present tense verb) in the place where the body had lain (imperfect verb). The image of angels at Jesus’s head and feet is something of a fiction in the sense that his body is no longer there, but this image would have been a powerful one for John’s audience—reminiscent of the ark of the covenant, which was covered in the golden mercy seat (Exodus 25:21) and had one angel on each end (25:19). The mercy seat was the place from which the Lord would meet the covenant people (25:21–22). When the tabernacle was built, the ark of the covenant was the only item in the holy of holies. Only the high priest, on one day each year, would enter that most sacred of spaces and pre-enact the atonement of Jesus Christ (Leviticus 16). The allusion to this event in John 20:12 is very striking: the very place where the Lord should appear is the place where his body is not. And yet the lack of a body *is* the message from the Lord—a message of the Resurrection.

As with the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Mary does not initially recognize Jesus when he appears (John 20:14), but she later recognizes him in the moment when he speaks her name (20:16). John’s audience would likely have interpreted this scene

in light of Jesus's teaching that the sheep recognize the shepherd when he calls them by name (10:2–5, 14–16). The proximity of Jesus's comments regarding the sheep recognizing the shepherd to his statement that no one can take his life from him unless he chooses to sacrifice it (10:17–18) would have perhaps been recalled by John's audience and would have emphasized during this crucial scene of recognition that Jesus himself had chosen to be resurrected and thus controlled the process himself. The focal point of John's account is consequently on Jesus's power and authority.

John's account seems to diverge from Luke's account in one notable respect. In Luke's account Jesus, without preamble, invited the disciples to touch him (Luke 24:39), but in John's account, the invitation to Thomas to touch him suggests that it is a concession to Thomas's doubt and that it would have been preferable had it not been necessary: "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). In terms of the literary presentation of the resurrection appearances, there is a significant difference in emphasis: Luke's account emphasizes the appropriateness of verifying the physical reality of the Resurrection while John's account suggests that the need to verify is a concession to lack of faith. Similarly, while Jesus eats fish in Luke's account, he does not do so in John's—even though Jesus is responsible for a miraculous catch of fish. The comparison of Luke's and John's accounts suggests the extent to which Luke wanted to emphasize the physical nature of the Resurrection, while John's concerns are elsewhere—primarily on Jesus's power and authority.

Conclusions

The various references to the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the New Testament make abundantly clear that it is one of the signal events taught by early church leaders. In some ways New Testament references to the Resurrection are more notable for what they do not contain than for what they do: there is precious little exploration of the details or implications of the Resurrection and far more concern with its factual, and often its physical, reality. The presence of eyewitnesses to the Resurrection is also a very important theme, and something that Peter specifically attests to in his preaching (Acts 5:32).

There are no canonized descriptions of the Resurrection itself; rather, the texts focus on the empty tomb and then on appearances of the resurrected Lord. The empty tomb scenes emphasize the physical reality of the Resurrection. The statement of the young man that "[Jesus] is risen" in Mark 16:6 conveys the simplicity and utter lack of adornment of the message. It is permitted to stand on its own; it is not elaborated, nor is it explained. Luke's Gospel, in particular, emphasizes the physical nature of Jesus's resurrection with Jesus's invitation to touch him and the inclusion of the detail that he ate fish. The stories of appearances by the resurrected Jesus provide an opportunity for him to give instruction to his disciples and for the disciples to become eyewitnesses to the reality of the Resurrection. Additionally, the appearance of the resurrected Jesus was an important counterpoint to the humiliating crucifixion, with the picture of Jesus's glory—not his suffering—becoming the last image of him in the minds of the Gospel audiences.



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Further Reading

- J. Peter Hansen. "Paul the Apostle: Champion of the Doctrine of the Resurrection." *Go Ye into All the World: Messages of the New Testament Apostles*, edited by Reid L. Nielson and Fred E. Woods, 13–26. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002.
- Eric D. Huntsman. *God So Loved the World: The Final Days of the Savior's Life*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011.
- Francis J. Moloney. *The Resurrection of the Messiah: A Narrative Commentary on the Resurrection Accounts in the Four Gospels*. New York: Paulist Press, 2013.

Notes

1. Other instances where the resurrection of Jesus Christ is mentioned tangentially include Romans 1:4; 4:24; 7:4; 8:11, 34; Ephesians 1:20; Galatians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Hebrews 6:2; 2 Timothy 2:8; and 1 Peter 1:3, 21.
2. Other instances where the Resurrection is mentioned in order to shape audience beliefs and behavior include Romans 6:1–14; 14:9; and 2 Corinthians 5:14.
3. Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 307.
4. Interestingly, in the Old Testament the only generally accepted references to life after death are in Isaiah 26:19 and Daniel 2:2, although many other texts can be interpreted to refer to postmortal life.
5. Interestingly, the apocryphal Gospel of Peter does contain an account of the actual moment of resurrection; most scholars regard it as rather fanciful and unlikely to have a strong historical foundation.
6. Richard C. Miller, "Mark's Empty Tomb and Other Translation Fables in Classical Antiquity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 129, no. 4 (2010): 767.
7. See Raymond Brown, "The Resurrection in Matthew (27:62–28:20)," *Worship* 64, no. 2 (March 1990): 159.
8. One disciple is identified as Cleopas (Luke 24:18); the other is not identified but could possibly be his wife (John 19:25).
9. Interestingly, there might be some difference between Luke's and Paul's perspectives on the resurrected body. Compare 1 Corinthians 15:50.
10. See Acts 1:3, 22; 2:30–31; 3:26; 4:2, 10, 33; 5:30–32; 10:40–41; 13:30, 37; 17:3, 18; 23:6; 25:19; 26:23.