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Jesus' Bodily Resurrection - A Legendary Development Based on Hallucinations - Licona vs. Carrier - Part 1

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Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

In this episode, a 2004 debate between Mike Licona and Richard Carrier, Licona presents a case for the resurrection of Jesus based on three facts that are strongly evidenced and acknowledged by the majority of scholars: 1) Jesus' death by crucifixion, 2) the empty tomb, and 3) the experiences of Jesus' disciples and his enemy Saul that they believed were appearances of the risen Jesus. Carrier contends that the earliest Christians only held that Jesus' soul was exalted and that the idea of a bodily resurrection, and the gospel testimony in favor of this, came later through Paul. Who makes the stronger case?

Transcript

Welcome to the Risen Jesus Podcast with Dr. Mike Licona. This is Kurt Jarrus welcoming you to the podcast. In this episode, Mike Licona and Richard Carrier square off at UCLA to debate whether Jesus rose bodily from the grave.

Dr. Licona says that while 100% certainty is rare in any historical investigation, the bodily resurrection is the best and most plausible explanation for the events following Jesus's crucifixion. Dr. Carrier contends that the belief in a physical historical resurrection was a legendary development based on the religious dreams and hallucinations of Jesus's grieving followers. See what you think.

Thanks for listening. All right. Hello, everyone.

If you can take your seats, we're ready to get started. Well, welcome. My name is Amy Schott.

I'm a Ph.D. candidate here in the School of Anthropology. And I have the pleasure to welcome you all to the ninth annual Veritas Forum at the University of Arizona. For those of you that are not familiar with the Veritas Forum, this is a nationwide event that is all about fostering dialogue and engaging with students, faculty, and teachers.

faculty and community members on university campuses to tackle some of life's hardest

questions. The Veritas Forum began in 1992 and has grown since then to take place all across the United States. And we're excited to be a part of this ongoing dialogue here at the University of Arizona for the past nine years.

The purpose of the Veritas Forum is to engage students, faculty, staff, and others with big questions of life. We answer questions like, why are we here? What is the purpose? What is our purpose in the world? How can we seek justice in a broken world? Is faith relevant to society? Veritas confronts these types of big picture questions, which are maybe not always directly addressed in some of the university courses. In particular, we seek to engage Christian faith in questions relevant to us and our place in the world.

And we try to do so in a thoughtful academic setting. Veritas is the Latin word for truth. Here, we place the historic Christian faith in dialogue with other beliefs and ideas to better understand truth and what it means for us as individuals, as a university community, and as a society.

In our pursuit of truth, we invite speakers and professors who have thought deeply about these questions to present on an area of their expertise in order to engage with us in this ongoing discussion. So tonight we're tackling this topic, our Christian claims verifiable, and does it matter? So wherever you are in your studies, whether you're a student, a faculty member, a community member, whatever your beliefs and background, I welcome you tonight to be a part of this conversation. One of our goals in hosting the Veritas Forum is to engage with you all as individuals and as a campus community.

Now, I've used this word engage several times, and I've done that with a specific purpose. Tonight is more than just about presenting you with an idea as you sit and listen. Tonight is about engaging with each other as a community.

So I hope that you all use tonight's dialogue as a starting point to continue the conversation and your own pursuit of what is truth and why is there. How is it important to your life? To help you do that, you'll notice in the program that several of our sponsoring student groups have ways that students and faculty can continue to engage in this topic and other related topics about faith in everyday life. So if you're interested, I hope you check that out.

And then just a quick note, we've also handed out a comment card that we ask that you fill out at the end of the night. You can turn it in on your way out the door and just tell us what you thought about the night and how you heard about us and that sort of thing. So just a few quick notes about the night.

If you haven't turned off your cell phone yet, please make sure that's off just so we can hear our speakers well. And then because we have two speakers tonight, we have a moderator who will be helping to guide that conversation. And at the end of the night will be the Q&A time.

And this is where we really expect engagement with all the audience. So the Q&A time will be, if

you have a question you can ask in person up at the microphone or you can text at any time throughout the night. There'll be a number up on the screen.

You can text your question there and there'll be a Q&A person receiving those texts and asking those for you at the end of the night. So two ways to ask questions. Keep that in mind as you're listening.

So now to begin I will introduce our moderator for the evening. Our moderator is Dan Grossenbach. Dan is a criminal investigator and he has used his professional skills and his inquisitive nature to test his own religious beliefs.

Dan got his undergraduate degree right here at the University of Arizona. And while he was here, he questioned his faith and thoroughly investigated whether Christian claims could be verified. He then went on to earn a master's degree with honors in Christian apologetics from Viola University in 2008 and has since been a regular speaker and writer on matters of religion.

He's also planned and participated in several public debates between Christians and those of other beliefs. And so with that I'd like to welcome our moderator, Dan Grossenbach. I'm the moderator which means I am the bad guy.

So I'm going to be cutting people off, keeping the time to the best of my ability. That includes you for Q&A although we encourage you to come up with good questions. We are asking are Christian claims verifiable and does it matter? On our Facebook page we had a variety of different discussion points and people were answering the question.

Yes, yes, no, no, yes, no, no, no, yes, all across the spectrum. And I assure you tonight we have two different perspectives you're going to be hearing from tonight. So what I wanted to do is tell you how this is going to go.

It's going to start with Dr. Mike Lekone who I'm going to introduce in a minute with a 20 minute opening speech followed by another 20 minute opening speech by Dr. Friesen. And then after that they're going to immediately go into a six minute rebuttal or response period. So Dr. Lekone will come back up to give a six minute rebuttal followed by Dr. Friesen coming up for his six minutes.

After that we open up Q&A. But the first question is going to be from Dr. Lekone to Dr. Friesen and from Dr. Friesen to Dr. Lekone taking off the Q&A. In that time I may remind you to get your questions ready.

So you can text them or come up to one of the mics on either side here. And if you could please just announce who the question might be for and then ask it. Each person, each speaker will have about two minutes to give their answer and then it will extend the offer for the other speaker to give about a one minute response.

As we're going here with this, during the course of the event I just asked for no big applause,

big shows of emotion either way until they're done speaking with a speech. And for the Q&A we'll try to reserve that to the end as well. So I'll further ado I'll introduce our speakers and then invite them one at a time to the podium.

Dr. Michael Lekone is Associate Professor of Theology at Houston Baptist University and President of Reason Jesus Inc. He has a PhD in New Testament Studies from the University of Pretoria which he earned with distinction. Dr. Lekone is author of numerous books and was interviewed by Lee Strobel in his book *The Case for the Real Jesus*.

In 2017 Dr. Lekone was elected to full membership in the Prestige Society for New Testament Studies. He has spoken on more than a hundred university campuses and has appeared on dozens of radio and television programs. Dr. Lekone's published works are available locally at Gospel Supplies.

Dr. Courtney Friesen specializes in religions in the Greek and Roman world, especially Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity. His research examines the Bible and its reception and reception of classical Greek literature. Dr. Friesen earned his PhD in 2013 from the University of Minnesota in Classical and Near Eastern Studies.

Before coming to the University of Arizona he taught at the University of Oxford, Faculty of Theology and Religion. So with that I'd like to welcome Dr. Hodyum, Dr. Mike Lekone. Well thank you, good evening everyone.

I want to thank Veritas Forum for having this event and I'd also like to thank Dan Grossenbach for inviting me to participate. Well life's an adventure, a journey, where do you want to go on yours? Well we're all going to have different answers but I think for the most part most of our answers are going to come down to a single simple answer. And that is, we want for our lives to have meaning.

Real meaning. Well where does real meaning come from? Well astronomers inform us that our universe will eventually die a, whoa, there we go. Astronomers tell us that our universe will eventually die a cold death.

Every star will burn out leaving an eternal cosmic night in which all life has ceased to exist. The entirety of human history including every one of us will be forgotten without any lasting value or meaning to human existence. If atheism is true, meaning is only to be found in what makes an individual fulfilled for the moment but ultimately nothing matters.

Shakespeare articulated this point eloquently in his tragedy of Macbeth. When the king learns of the Queen's death he says, out out brief candle. Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then has heard no more.

It is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing. Now for a moment let's consider the possibility that God exists, that life is part of God's plan and that he actually loves you. Well in that case your life is value because of who you are created in God's image.

Therefore your life and what you do has meaning. Real meaning. What is this scenario true? The question we're debating this evening is, are Christian claims verifiable and does it matter? Surely the first part of this question, our Christian claims verifiable refers to the claims of the earliest Christians about Jesus.

So perhaps our question may be restated as follows. Can historians verify claims about Jesus made by the earliest Christians? Well the answer to that question is yes and no. One of the claims of the earliest Christians is Jesus died for our sins.

Now historians can verify that Jesus was executed and died as a result. However they don't have the tools to verify that his death at the tones for our sins. So they can often verify the historical elements of a statement but of course they can't verify the theological ones.

Moreover there are many reports that historians cannot verify due to a lack of evidence. And this is true of all ancient historiography as it is of the gospels. However using the tools of their trade and despite their differing worldviews, historians of Jesus have arrived at a consensus that Jesus was a historical person who lived in Palestine in the early first century.

That he was a Jewish itinerant creature who believed God had chosen him to usher in his kingdom. That he often taught using parables that he performed deeds that astonished crowds and that both he and his followers regarded as divine miracles and exorcisms. That he opposed the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem who then arrested him and brought him before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate who had him crucified in April of either the year 30 or 33.

Nearly every historian of Jesus grants these facts and more. I think we can go further and verify Jesus' resurrection. That event is important because Jesus claimed it would be assigned to everyone that his message is true.

So I'm going to build a positive historical case for Jesus' resurrection using two major building blocks, facts and method. Now that's so simple that even a Southern Baptist can understand. Let's begin with the facts.

Historians don't always agree on what's a fact. So in order to make things simple for all of us, I'm only going to appeal to those items that virtually all historians regard as facts, whether they're Christian, Jewish, agnostic, or atheist. This is important because all of us are biased due to our race, gender, ethics, nationality, our political, philosophical, and religious convictions, the way we were raised, the academic institutions with which were affiliated, and the very group of people whose acceptance and respect we desire.

There's just no way around this. That's why it's valuable to consider what a heterogeneous consensus of experts in the relevant fields think. That consensus provides us with fairly secure ground on which to begin.

Now of course the consensus can be mistaken. But before you can dismiss a consensus of experts on the matter, you may want to educate yourself on that matter more than watching a

few YouTube videos and then discussing it on social media. In what follows, I'll provide four facts relevant to the question of Jesus' resurrection that are granted by a heterogeneous consensus of scholars in the relevant fields.

Given time constraints, I won't be able to explain why historians regard these as facts in my opening statement. So here they are. Number one, Jesus was crucified on the orders of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and died as a result.

Number two, shortly after Jesus' death, a number of his disciples had experiences they believed were the risen Jesus appearing to them. Number three, some of their experiences were group experiences. And number four, within about five years of Jesus' death, a persecutor of the Christian church named Paul had an experience he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus, and it radically transformed his life from being a persecutor of the church to one of its most able defenders.

Now what do we do with these four facts? This brings us to our second major building block method. Since historians are unable to climb into a time machine and return to the past to verify their conclusions, they employ strictly controlled historical method to determine what probably occurred. This method employs criteria, I'm sorry, involves criteria to see how well a hypothesis can accommodate the known facts.

The hypothesis that accounts for the facts better than competing hypotheses is regarded as what probably occurred. This method is called inference to the best explanation. Let me show you how it works.

There are four criteria that are typically used to assess hypotheses. The first is called explanatory scope. Now think of a jigsaw puzzle.

The puzzle solution that incorporates all of the puzzle pieces is preferable to one that leaves a few of those puzzle pieces stranded because one doesn't know how they fit in the puzzle solution. Likewise, a hypothesis capable of explaining all of the relevant data is preferable to one that fails to account for some of them. The second criterion is explanatory power.

If a hypothesis is true, we expect certain things to result. Let's say that a man has just completed serving a ten-year prison term overseas and he's just been released and he lands back in the United States and his brothers there at the airport to pick him up. So as a catch-and-out, his brother says, and you won't believe this, the Chicago Cubs won the World Series in 2016.

His brother says, no way, prove it. And so he says, well, with the Cubs won the World Series, there would have been a celebratory parade in Chicago, right? And so he takes out and shows him a photo of it. In historical investigation, to the extent that we have the data, we would expect if a hypothesis were true, that hypothesis is said to have explanatory power.

The third criterion is less ad hoc. In historical method, ad hoc elements are typically

improvisational in nature and are used to fill in a weak spot in a hypothesis. Why did Hitler carry such a hatred of Jews? Well, we don't know.

But to guess that he was bullied by a Jewish boy when he was young would be pure speculation, it's ad hoc in that sense. In historical investigation, the hypothesis that is least ad hoc is preferred. The fourth and final criterion is plausibility.

Plausibility is the degree to which a hypothesis is compatible with our background knowledge. The statement that a three-year-old bench pressed 300 pounds is implausible given our background knowledge of what three-year-olds are capable of doing. However, if our background knowledge included the fact that my friend Mike DeVito, who was a defensive lineman in the NFL, was present and helped the three-year-old bench press that 300 pounds, well, that changes everything.

And the statement that a three-year-old bench pressed 300 pounds is then plausible. Strictly controlled historical method assesses hypotheses using these four criteria. The hypothesis that best fulfills the criteria is regarded as what probably occurred.

Now, let's assess the two leading hypotheses among today's scholars pertaining to the question of Jesus' resurrection. The first is the hallucination hypothesis. And it usually goes like this.

After Jesus' sudden and brutal death, his disciples were grief-stricken and experienced hallucinations of Jesus that convinced them he had risen from the dead. Let's assess this hypothesis using the four criteria just discussed. Explanatory scope.

The hallucination hypothesis nicely accounts for Jesus' death by crucifixion since that event would produce grief in his disciples' rendering them candidates for hallucinations. However, multiple studies on hallucinations reveal that only around seven percent of those in the frame of mind to hallucinate are likely to experience a visual hallucination. Thus, with Jesus' disciples, we would anticipate one, or perhaps two of them, experiencing a visual hallucination of Jesus.

But our earliest reports give the appearances to all of them 100%, which would be unthinkable and without precedent for hallucinations. Therefore, the hallucination hypothesis does not account for the high percentage of those actually claiming to have seen Jesus. Moreover, because hallucinations are false sensory perceptions of something that's not actually there, they occur only in the mind of an individual and have no external reality.

In that sense, hallucinations are like dreams. I couldn't wake up my wife in the middle of the night and say, honey, I'm having this dream, I'm in Maui. Go back to sleep, join me in my dream, and let's have a free vacation.

You can't do that. Well, it's the same with hallucinations. Groups cannot experience them.

So, the hallucination hypothesis cannot account for the reports of appearances of Jesus to

groups and the high percentage of the disciples claiming to have seen him. The hallucination hypothesis also does a poor job of accounting for the appearance to Paul, the persecutor, since he regarded Jesus as a failed messiah and false prophet. He wasn't grieving over Jesus' death.

He hated Jesus in the movement he had started. So, Jesus would have been the last person in the universe that Paul would have wanted to see or would have expected to see. Accordingly, since the hallucination hypothesis accounts for very little, it has poor explanatory scope.

It's a planetary power. If the hallucination hypothesis is true, we expect certain things to result. As just stated, we don't expect one or perhaps two of Jesus' disciples to have experienced a visual hallucination of him.

And just like every other failed messianic movement of that time, we'd expect movement Jesus started to fall apart after his death and for Christianity to become nothing more than a footnote in future history books. But these aren't at all what we get. Instead, all of Jesus' disciples claimed to have experienced the risen Jesus appearing to them, some even in group settings, and Christianity grows to become the world's largest religion.

So, we do not get what we anticipate if the hallucination hypothesis were true. Thus, it lacks explanatory power. If any improvised elements been added in order to make the hallucination hypothesis work, not usually, so it passes the less ad hoc criterion.

But sometimes an ad hoc element is present when scholars become armchair psychologists. For example, one scholar suggested that Paul's conversion resulted from a hallucination prompted by secret doubts, a growing distaste for Judaism, and having a childhood Gentile friend. The problem with these, of course, is not a scrap of evidence exists for any of them.

It's entirely ad hoc. The fourth and final criterion is plausibility. Because the hallucination hypothesis requires an unthinkable 100% of Jesus' disciples to experience visual hallucinations, as well as multiple group hallucinations, which are extremely rare if not impossible, it's incompatible with our background knowledge and is therefore implausible.

In summary, the hallucination hypothesis is usually not ad hoc. However, it has weak explanatory scope, terrible explanatory power, and is implausible. It's a weak hypothesis.

Now, let's move along and assess the other major hypothesis, the resurrection hypothesis. This hypothesis easily accounts for all of the four facts. If Jesus rose, we anticipate he would show himself to his disciples and perhaps even an enemy, and that's what we get.

Therefore, the resurrection hypothesis has excellent explanatory scope and power. Are there any ad hoc elements in the resurrection hypothesis? Responsible historians understand that worldviews often play an unhealthy role in assessing a miracle hypothesis. If a historian isn't careful, her worldview rather than the data will be the guiding force of her investigation.

And the danger with this such a practice is clear. Bad philosophy corrupts good history.

Therefore, historians should either presuppose God's existence, nor are priori excluded.

Instead, they all adopt a position of openness and let the facts speak for themselves through the proper assessment of hypotheses. The resurrection hypothesis, of course, does not exclude God's existence, but it doesn't assume it. So, it's not ad hoc.

The fourth and final criterion is plausibility. It's certainly true that the dead do not return to life by natural causes. It's also true that your authors just never claim that Jesus came back to life by natural causes.

Instead, they claim God had raised Jesus. And that changes things just as the NFL player assisting the three-year-old with a bench press changes things. Accordingly, unless a spiritual dimension is disproved, the resurrection hypothesis is not initially implausible in view of natural law.

But can the resurrection hypothesis be said to be plausible in a positive sense? I guess that most of us in this auditorium think there's a spiritual or supernatural dimension of reality, even if you're not a Christian. And the data strongly support the existence of such a dimension. There are more than 100 well-evident, near-death experiences documented by professionals.

While clinically dead, the person has an out-of-body experience during which they receive accurate information that could not have possibly known otherwise. These experiences suggest the existence of a spiritual dimension and that there's life after death for at least some people. I could go on and mention for radical apparitions, extreme answer to prayer, and paranormal phenomena.

But the near-death experiences alone strongly suggest the spiritual dimension of reality and life after death is a pretty big step toward resurrection. And that gives some plausibility to the resurrection hypothesis. It's clear that the resurrection hypothesis is far superior to the hallucination hypothesis.

And one one subjects other alternative hypotheses to the same process of strictly controlled historical method. The resurrection hypothesis comes out on top every time. Therefore, the early Christian claim that Jesus rose from the dead is verifiable.

In historical terms, it probably occurred. That brings us back to the question, does it matter? Truth is important. If an airline informs you that your claim leaves at 10 a.m., when it actually leaves at 9 a.m., truth matters.

If your professor tells you that your quiz is over chapter three, when it's actually over chapter four, truth matters. If your spouse tells you that he's working late when he's actually spending time with his mistress, truth matters. Since Jesus predicted he would rise from the dead, if historical inquiry proved that he failed to do so, truth matters.

And we would be right to conclude that Jesus was a false prophet, that Christianity is a false

religion, and those of us who are Christians should abandon it because any meaning it provides is illusory. Even the Apostle Paul writing within 25 years of Jesus' death set, if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless. On the other hand, if Jesus actually rose from the dead, truth matters.

His claims about himself and his message that God loves you are true. You have worth, because God made you in his image. Therefore, your life has meaning, real meaning.

Thanks, Dr. Leichorna. Dr. Courtney Friesen. So I was particularly pleased to accept this invitation to address this topic, because exploring Christian claims is a large part of what I do here at the university, in my position on faculty.

I teach courses on the Bible, especially the New Testament, ranging from introductory levels for students with little to no background, all the way through advanced courses. In fact, we are now offering a minor in New Testament language in literature in which students can learn to read the New Testament in the original language of ancient Greek. And in so doing, even meet one of the university's foundation, general education requirements.

So students study historical events surrounding New Testament, its composition, its literary and cultural context. Most importantly, from my perspective, the aim of our programs and course offerings is to give students the tools to analyze Christian claims for themselves, so that they may consider these profoundly important texts and ideas firsthand and not merely take our word for it. So if any of that strikes you as worth pursuing, or if any of the topics addressed in this evening's event are of interest to you, please do stay around and chat with me afterwards or track my email address down online, and I'd be happy to meet with you to discuss further.

Now, before attempting to answer the question, are Christian claims verifiable? It is quite important to define what is meant by these words, and of course not all of us will use them in precisely the same way. So first, verification. I will take this to mean testable by shared methods of intellectual and academic inquiry, for instance, scientific or historical methods.

Here is important to eliminate possible misinterpretation. To say that something is not verifiable is not to say that it is not true, or that one shouldn't believe it. But some religious claims are clearly not the kinds of things that are within the realm of verification.

For instance, especially individual and private revelations from God. As an illustration, let me point to something that I'm told apparently occasionally happens among students of your age, for those of you who are students here tonight. A love struck youth receives a message from God, and armed with this approaches a young woman or man declaring, God told me to marry you.

Now, if you find yourself on the receiving end of this, you should most definitely ask for verification. But what kind of evidence could this prospective groom or bride induce in support of his or her claim? There is, of course, nothing that can be offered. God spoke privately to this

individual alone.

He or she can't prove it, and conversely, you can't disprove it. Now, the point to be made here is simply that some religious claim, such as God told me to marry you, are fundamentally not the sorts of things that are susceptible to verification. And many sensual Christian claims, I would argue, are of a similar status.

We find this in fact throughout the Bible from the very first books where Moses received the words of the law on the mountain directly from the finger of God to the last book of Revelation where the Prophet John is taken up into heaven to see a vision of what is to come at the end of days. In this vein, later Christians would come to view all the books of the Bible as similarly inspired by God. But the divine inspiration of Scripture is, strictly speaking, not something that we can verify.

It is of the God told me to marry you, type. So when I speak of verification, my interest will be in those claims that deal with material in a shared public sphere of data, claims to which all observers, whether they be believers or unbelievers, have the same access, and the methods deployed in this sort of verification must likewise be those upon which all interpreters of this data, regardless of faith commitments, may broadly agree. For lack of a better term, then, I will refer to these as academic methods.

For my purposes, historical and literary criticism, though if we were scientists, we might likewise employ the fields of cosmology or biology in relation to religious claims. What then about Christian claims? There we go. So this phrase is, of course, vague and undeveloped, which Christians, Christians have, of course, now existed for nearly 2,000 years and have found in almost every country on the globe.

Do we mean 1st century Christians, such as the authors of the New Testament? Do we mean 21st century Christians? Do we mean Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, with all of its variations? Perhaps then it would be useful to take, as a starting point, the Nicene Creed, a statement that was first written in the year 325 to function as a sort of universal affirmation. And indeed, even now today, is accepted still among nearly all branches of Christianity. So it's useful for our purposes because it is in a sense a list, bullet point, list of fundamental Christian claims.

Now, as we look down this list, consider which of these claims falls within the realm of verification. We believe in one God. Now, that one God exists and that he is the creator of the world is to be sure something that philosophers and scientists have been debating for as long as philosophy and science have existed.

But I, for one, remain unconvinced that either the believers or the atheists have achieved anything approaching a verification. At most, those on each side have managed to convince themselves that their view is slightly more compatible with logic and scientific evidence than the other. What about the claim that Jesus is the only begotten son of God? How could that

possibly be verified? What kind of evidence would need to be furnished? Someone might say that it is verified by his extraordinary miraculous deeds.

But of course, we only know about these deeds because they are written down by the very people who were already convinced that he was the son of God. And we have no independent witness to them confirming that they were more than mere fabrications. And that is, of course, precisely what would be required for verification.

Someone else might say that we know he is the only son of God because of his uniquely inspired teaching. But here again, we don't have direct access to his teachings. We only have what the gospel writer has composed decades after his death.

And again, it cannot be verified by independent corroborating sources. And we might add also that comparable miraculous deeds and revolutionary teachings have been attributed to numerous prominent religious leaders throughout history. And none of these are necessarily verified as the only son of God.

Perhaps there is verification that he is the only son of God in that God raised him from the dead. Now, come back to the evidence for the resurrection later. But here it should be noted that merely rising from the dead does not establish one as the one and only son of God.

For according to the Bible, at least the prophet Elijah raised a child from the dead and Jesus himself raised Lazarus. Now, similar conclusions could be drawn regarding much of the rest of this creed. In fact, as we look down this impressive list of Christian claims, there really is only one that lends itself to confident verification.

You'll have to take my word for it. That is that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate. Now, the reason that this event is verified is because it is also noted by the Roman historian Tacitus writing in the early second century.

But this kind of historical detail is very much the exception. And moreover, it strikes me that this particular fact that is scarcely essential to Christianity. That is that it was Pontius Pilate who oversaw the execution rather than say, Marcellus, his successor, or one of the Herod's.

So this leads me to the main thesis I would like to propose this evening. Those claims that are most central to the core of Christianity throughout its history are precisely the sorts of things that fall outside of the realm of verification. Conversely, oftentimes, though not always, Christian claims that move out further from this core of historic Christianity are more likely to be a vast sort, that is, testable for verification.

And consequently, also susceptible to be proven false. Let me illustrate this. In the closing lines of the Nicene Creed, we find the following claim.

The Holy Spirit spoke by the prophets. Now, who were the prophets? These are, among others, the legendary individuals behind many of the writings of the Bible. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,

and probably we should also add Moses, and David, and others.

Thus, this statement entails a claim about God's voice speaking in and through the texts of Scripture. A point that has been nearly universally accepted by Christians, but one that, as I have already noted, is not up for verification. But some Christian communities have not been satisfied with this and have pressed it further.

Consider, for example, the Southern Baptist Convention's faith and message. This is a sort of modern Credo statement defining certain Christian claims, and it's relevant here tonight because it is that statement which is affirmed by the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the denomination that founded Houston Baptist University, Dr. Lachlan's institution. Now, here's what it has to say about the Bible.

As we read through this statement, you will notice that, again, there is very little here that can be subjected to verification. Much of this is of the God told me to marry you tight. The Holy Bible was written by divinely inspired, men divinely inspired.

It is a perfect treasure. It has God for its author, etc. There is, however, one claim that we can test, and that is that the Bible is without mixture of error.

Here, we have abundant evidence that is available for scrutiny equally by everyone. So let's consider one example. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is justifying his disciples picking grain on the Sabbath, which was apparently disproved by the Pharisees because they counted his work, and he cites an example from the Old Testament.

Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of presents. Now, we are in a position to take up Jesus' challenge and to read what David did. We can move our slide down to 1 Samuel, chapter 21, where the story originates.

It goes as follows. David came to knock on the high priest, the High Priest. The High Priest came trembling to meet David and David said to the priest, a High Priest, give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here.

The priest answered, I have no ordinary bread at hand, only the holy bread. Now, with this data before us, we are in a position to verify, or rather in this case, alternatively, to disprove the Christian claim that the Bible is without error. Now, clearly some people here, perhaps some of us on stage, will disagree with this point, but I would expect that most neutral observers, and an advanced degree in biblical studies, is not required to be among them, most neutral observers will conclude that at least one of these two texts contains an error.

The high priest was not both, Abiathar and the High Priest. Now, it should, of course, be clear to everyone at this point that I have chosen a most trivial of points. But I've raised it here to illustrate how, in contrast to this back to statement of faith, the historic tenets of Christianity, such as those in the Nicene Creed, are largely beyond this sort of verification.

It should also be clear that this alleged error has little consequence for those more central claims, even if it does expose the shortcomings of this one claim associated with one Baptist denomination. But what about those more central claims of Christianity, such as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which is, of course, central to the Nicene Creed also? The New Testament is, as you will probably know, unanimous on this point, that God raised Jesus from the dead. But specifically what kind of evidence would be required to verify this.

By the very strictest standards, we might like to have a scientific record of the vital signs of Jesus after his coming back to life. Though I suspect most of us here tonight are comfortable with our own ability simply to observe by observation that someone is alive. If you look to the person on your right and the person on your left, I hope that you can verify that they are, in fact, living just by looking, even if I have put them to sleep by this point.

We might further want to have a record of a medical exam establishing that the body was genuinely dead, not merely unconscious. Finally, we would like to have some sort of test, perhaps a DNA test, to confirm that this living person is, in fact, the same person who was dead and not merely a look-alike substitute. Now, of course, no fair-minded person would demand that level of evidence.

So short of this, we must fall back on what we do have, and that is the claims and testimonies of Christians in the first century, and that is all we have. And here the evidence is often problematic. The first written testimony that we have regarding the resurrection comes from the Apostle Paul.

He began writing nearly two decades after the death of Jesus, and by his own admission, he never met Jesus during his earthly life. He became a convert later. Consider what he writes in 1 Corinthians 15.

Christ was raised on the third day in accordance with scriptures. He appeared to Cephas, then to the 12. Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom were still alive.

Though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, last of all, as to one untimely born. He appeared also to me.

Now, this is indeed an impressive claim, but we need to stop and consider what a resurrection appearance might have entailed for Paul. Slide please. In another place he speaks of it as follows, but when God was pleased to reveal his son to me, I did not confer with any human being.

Now, here we have something much more in the realm of a private revelation God revealed his son to me. Just the sort of thing that cannot be readily verified. This is in the God told me to marry you, type.

Now, as we return to the passage from 1 Corinthians, we note that in each instance the same

verb is used with respect to all of the other eyewitnesses. So, whatever Paul imagines these appearances consisted of, they are not by nature verifiable accounts. Now, moving beyond Paul, the earliest written gospel, the gospel of Mark, concludes without any eyewitnesses at all.

Rather, it merely ends with the empty tomb, and a mysterious young man instructing the women who had come to the tomb to tell Peter that the disciples should go to Galilee where they would meet Jesus. It is only in the later gospels, written some 10, 20, 30 or more years after Mark, that we begin to find eyewitness accounts of Jesus' post-resurrection. Now, in Matthew, the women meet Jesus himself on the way to the tomb, and he repeats the instructions of the angel that we met in Mark to go to Galilee.

Subsequently, they meet Jesus only after they arrive in Galilee where they worship him on the mountain. Now, Luke adds additional eyewitnesses. But whereas in Matthew, the disciples would only see him after going to Galilee, in Luke, Jesus meets two of them on the road to Emmaus on the very day of his resurrection, which is roughly seven miles from Jerusalem.

Then he appears among them in Jerusalem where they can inspect his resurrected body. Now, in Acts, and this is the text that you will see on the screen, a sequel of Luke written by the same author, Jesus specifically instructs the disciples to remain in Jerusalem. Now, I would like to reassert what I said at the outset.

None of this proves that the resurrection did not occur. But if we are looking to verify the accounts of it as they are presented in the New Testament, or if we endeavor to use the New Testament accounts as evidence to verify the historical reality of the resurrection, we immediately run into problems because they cannot agree on where Jesus encountered the disciples after his resurrection. Now, does any of this matter? Many Christians believe that their faith is bolstered by the accumulation of historical and scientific evidences and diversifications.

What I have suggested on the contrary is that the sensual message of historic Christianity is not something that lends itself to such treatment. What is undeniable, however, is that the resurrection of Jesus has captured the human imagination since it was first preached nearly 2,000 years ago. Its transformative power arises from, among other things, its demonstration that self-sacrificial acts of love for one's friends, and indeed even for one's enemies, are genuinely transcendent and truly divine.

These are the means of breathing new life into the corpses produced by the forces of prejudice, greed, and violence in the world all around us. But the endeavor to prove these things are so, I fear, runs the risk of trivializing it. Consider Jesus' words to the Dowling Thomas in the Gospel of John, who refused to accept the testimony of the apostles unless he could physically verify the bodily evidence for himself.

Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. Thank you. Alright, I think we're seeing a little bit of an intersection here in finite where the differences lie a little bit.

That was great. So, well, boy, the Baptist took a hit on both of your sentences. That's what I should expect from a martial artist and a hockey player, though, here we go.

So, we're going to start off with a, or start off, we're going to continue rather with a rebuttal, so Dr. Lykona. Alright, well, thank you, Courtney. The question being debated is, are Christian claims verifiable and does it matter? In my opening statement, I contended that historians are able to verify many items about Jesus reported by the earliest Christians.

However, they don't possess the appropriate tools to verify theological elements, and Courtney agrees with me on this. We can't verify personal revelation. We can't verify that the Scriptures are divinely inspired.

We can't verify most of the elements in the Nicene Creed. I then contended that it is possible for the historian to verify the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. I explained how historians employ arguments of inference to the best explanation.

This is the method that historians do use, the accepted method that historians use to verify things and to discover the past. I demonstrated how the resurrection hypothesis is far superior to its leading competitor, the hallucination hypothesis, and that other competing hypotheses meet a similar fate. Therefore, the resurrection hypothesis describes what probably occurred and can be verified.

Now, Courtney replied, well, let's go with Paul. He's our earliest evidence. When you look at Paul's letter to the Church of Galatia in Galatia, Paul says that God revealed his son to me.

It was an internal kind of experience. Not necessarily, the Greek there, N.M.O.I. can mean numerous things. It's really ambiguous in this text, actually.

Later on in Galatians, N.M.O.I. is used to mean to me. The best translation in my opinion is God revealed his son to me. It has nothing to do with the nature of the appearance or saying that this was something that happened internally.

He says that in 1 Corinthians, we have the same verb that is used to refer to the other appearances. He's referring to the oral tradition that has been stylized in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 3 through 7, where he says he appeared to Peter, then to the 12, then to more than 500 at one time, then to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one in Timothy Born, he appeared also to me.

It is the same verb, but that's only referring to the chronology of the events. It has nothing at all to do with the nature of the appearances. I could say, look, since Paul really doesn't describe the nature of his appearance in his letters and he doesn't, the only way that we have something that talks about the nature of those appearances is in the Book of Acts, in chapters 9, 22, and 26.

The majority of today's scholars who opined on the authorship of Luke Acts admit that whoever

this author was, he was a traveling companion of Paul, and so when he describes the appearance of Jesus to him, the resurrection appearance, this is probably coming directly from Paul that is given to the author of Luke Acts. And it is a different kind than what we find narrated in the Gospels. However, we have to take into consideration that this is a post ascension event, whereas the disciples saw Jesus prior to his ascension, and that could make a huge difference.

Now, then he says, well, what about Mark? There's no appearances in Mark. Well, the majority of scholars today are kind of split with about half of them saying that Mark intended to find his Gospel there with the women just fleeing and saying nothing to no one, which is quite awkward. And then it's like where you have five New Testament scholars, you have seven opinions on why there was the ending ends like this, and no agreement.

And then you have the other half of New Testament scholars who would say Mark did not intend to end his Gospel there, but either it got lost or he was unable to because he was put in prison or he died before he could. And we just don't know. However, what we do know is that Mark has Jesus on numerous occasions throughout the Gospel, predicting his imminent death and resurrection and saying he will appear to them.

In fact, just a couple chapters before in 1428, he tells them that there would go to Galilee and they'll see him there after he's risen from the dead. And then the angel tells the women in chapter 16 verse 7 that you're to go to Galilee and there you will see him just as he told you. So it is anticipated that they will see him and we have to remember that Paul mentions all these appearances in his letter to 1 Corinthians before Mark is even written.

So everyone was known about these appearances anyway. He says the first eyewitnesses weren't until the other Gospels. Well, again, you've got Paul before and he mentions a bunch, Peter the 12 to more than 500 to all the Apostles to James and then Paul lists himself.

He says in Acts Jesus instructs his disciples to remain in Jerusalem, but Matthew has them in Galilee. Well, there's a number of different reasons that we could give for this. There's certainly some compositional devices going on.

I've written about this extensively in a book I published with Oxford University Press last year on why their differences in the Gospels. The title of that book is *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?* Now, so I do think the Christian claim that Jesus rose from the dead can be verified. This brings us to the second part of our debate question, *Does It Matter?* And I contend that if Jesus rose from the dead, Christianity is true, therefore each of us has value and our lives have real meaning because we've made a God's image.

According, it didn't give any response to this or provide any reason to think otherwise. So I think we can say that Jesus' resurrection has been verified and it does matter. Thank you.

I'd like to remind you of this time to get your questions ready. And since this is a focused

dialogue, we're really specific on our topic. It's a very narrow focus, as you can tell.

Try to be as relevant as you can. So, for example, a question on evolution or maybe Buddhism might not fit in unless you can make it fit. And I may give you even more help if you do come with something that's not really relevant.

I may regurgitate a little bit to try to make it relevant just as a warning. So we're going to have text questions and I think there's a number for them to text. I think up on the screen or at some point they can do that.

So get your questions ready. Alright, Dr. Friesen. Thank you.

Okay. So I would like to pick up on a theme from another one of Dr. Lycona's books. And that is his 700-page tome on the resurrection of Jesus, which is worth picking up if you're interested in this topic.

I will confess that I have not read all 700 pages. For those pages that I have read I've found very interesting, well written and rigorous. In the book he introduces a category that he calls historical bedrock.

Those things that we can know about Jesus and the immediate after effect of his life and death. And these he lists roughly speaking as that Jesus was reputed to be a miracle working exorcist. That Jesus was executed by crucifixion.

That shortly after his death his disciples had experiences that led them to proclaim his resurrection. And forcefully that Paul a very few years after Jesus death converted after experiencing what he interpreted as a post resurrection appearance. I would contend that those four points are verifiable.

They have corroborating evidence of various sorts that are satisfactory to I think any historian. Tonight however he gave us four facts. The different slightly.

Four facts I think because they were related to the resurrection. And here I worry that the facts have moved away from what can be verified and what all interpreters accept as facts. And these revolve around the third point about the group experiences of the resurrection.

Or rather the group experiences of appearances of the resurrected Jesus. And I worry that these are no longer verifiable facts. The reasons for this will of course become clear in the talk that I gave moments ago.

But the group the evidence that groups of people saw the resurrected Jesus is not in the same category of verification as these other points. At least to the same to garner the same level of acceptance. This is in part because what I have pointed out about Paul.

Paul seems to have had a tradition that predates himself. The tradition that we both talked about from 1 Corinthians 15. I think there is no problem in asserting that these early Christians

came to the firm conviction and belief that they had encountered the resurrected Jesus.

The problem comes or breaks down in the link between what people believed about Jesus and what we can verify about it. And that is to say that beliefs about Jesus being raised from the dead don't move easily to verifiable evidence that Jesus was raised from the dead. So to me Paul then becomes a sort of a linchpin and since Dr. Lykota has brought Acts into the picture.

I guess I will identify myself as the other half of New Testament scholars who don't necessarily think that Acts was written by a traveling companion of the apostle. But the conversion of Paul and Paul's experience of the resurrected Christ in Acts is narrated on three different occasions. And each time we get a slightly different perception of what occurred.

And let me just read them from the text. This comes from Acts 9 chapter 7. The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. So this is the author of Acts description of what happened to Paul on the famous road to Damascus.

There he was traveling and the light shot of forth. And this is Paul's experience as narrated by Acts. What intrigues us here is who else was brought into this moment of experience.

I'm going to move quickly to the other account. So in Acts chapter 9 they heard the voice but saw no one. In Acts chapter 22 verse 9 we get the same story recorded by Paul where he says those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking.

So we have a divergence on who saw what when. And we could connect this further to the distinction between God's revelation in Paul and God's revelation to Paul. A distinction that Dr. Lacona made but I would suggest that that doesn't eliminate the problem of the private nature of the revelation that Paul has claimed to have for himself.

Whether it's to him or in him or any other preposition that one might like to include. So I apologize for going over. Thank you for that freedom.

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