

OpenTheo

S3E2 - Horizons | Risen Jesus Podcast

July 31, 2019



Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

According to Dr. Licona we all look at the world through the lens of "horizons" - even the best historians. What are horizons? Does it affect the way we practice history and view texts like the Bible?

The Risen Jesus podcast with Dr. Mike Licona equips people to have a deeper understanding of the Gospel, history, and New Testament studies. The program is hosted by Kurt Jaros and produced in partnership with Defenders Media.

website | <http://risenjesus.com>

facebook | <http://www.fb.me/michael.r.licona/>

twitter | <http://www.twitter.com/michaellicona>

Transcript

(upbeat music) - Hello and welcome to The Risen Jesus Podcast with Dr. Mike Lacona. Dr. Lacona is Associate professor of theology at Houston Baptist University, and he's a frequent speaker on university campuses, churches, conferences, and has appeared on dozens of radio and television programs. Mike is the president of Risen Jesus, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

My name is Kurt Jarrus, your host. On today's episode, we're continuing season three as we look at Mike's thick, I mean, could we call it a magnum opus? I mean, it's a big thick book here on the resurrection of Jesus. A new historiographical approach came out in what, 2010? - Yes.

- And so we're going through the lengthy work here. So on last week's episode, we sort of had an introduction to historical investigation. We asked some simple questions like, what's history and those sorts of things.

And now I want to talk on today's episode about biases, or at least what you call in your

book, horizons. - That's right. - Tell me why is it called horizons and not biases? - Well, it includes our biases, horizons.

That's not my term, it's one that philosophers of history give it. Our horizons basically are our pre-understanding when we come to an investigation. So it includes our biases.

And our biases are based on our race, gender ethics, nationality, our political, religious, philosophical convictions, the way we were raised, the academic institutions we attended, the group of people with whom we fellowship, our colleagues, they have certain views. And you want to be respected and accepted by them. So all these things motivate one.

And they create this pre-understanding when you come to an investigation. - So everyone's got horizons. - Yep, they're like sunglasses you put on, right? And but everybody has different tints.

The way we look at the world. - Different colors even though the same. - Exactly, it's the way we look at the world.

And there's different shades. So an African American who went through being discriminated against in the '50s and '60s is gonna have a different horizon than a white person going through at the same time. Or even a white person today.

I can't fully grasp what a person went through at that point and how they might think today. 'Cause I haven't experienced that. And I might not experience what they're experiencing even today.

- Now you say you can't fully grasp but you can even still get an idea of that. And that's bringing the analogy back over to history. You know, one's horizon it might concern people that because of the biases of people we can't even know what happened back then.

But that's not your view, right? - No, no, we can certainly know about the past. That's one of the things about multiple independent sources, right? And you look for people with different horizons and if they're agreeing on certain things, well then that would seem, but you know, here's a modern example of the horizon how it can impact, okay? So let's say a person is perfectly healthy. They're not really having any, I mean, look, you're in your early 30s, right? 31 I think, right? So you probably don't really have any health problems at this point and you think, okay, well, when we talk about healthcare for Americans, if you want healthcare, look, it's not a right, right? So if you want healthcare by health insurance, it's not an entitlement.

But then you might have someone who is poor, who has some serious health issues, and they can't even get health insurance because of preexisting conditions, they either can't get it or it's just astronomically high, they're gonna have a little bit different horizon on

their views about health insurance by the government or socialized medicine that maybe you would have. So our horizons do impact how we view things. And even applying it to the gospels themselves, that the gospel authors had horizons and they had what came about as different purposes for writing what they wrote about for Jesus.

So even with the gospel of John, he's got a different intent, it seems, with what he's trying to do, the story he's telling, the biography he's telling, then say the synoptics. And you can even see different emphases between Luke and Matthew and that sort of thing. - Yeah, that might not so much be the horizons.

Of course, everyone's gonna have different horizon, right? Someone who was like Matthew, who was a former tax collector, is gonna have a different horizon than say, John the son of Zebedee, who was a fisherman, just based because of what you do and the kind of people you hung out with. But in terms they're all wanting to write about Jesus, so they might have little different objectives or emphases that they wanna write about. That doesn't necessarily mean they're different horizons.

There'd just be different objectives in writing. But of course, again, John and the others are gonna have different horizons. You're brought up as a Gentile, you're gonna have a different horizon and someone who's brought up as a Jew in those days.

- Yeah, if people have similar horizons, is that gonna lead them to same conclusions and certainly with folks with different horizons, they'll be led to different conclusions? Is that a general rule, but maybe we could think of exceptions? - Yeah, probably. But a person, they can, okay, so some of my views have changed over the years. So I had a horizon that would be similar to someone else's, I'm sure, but then as I go deeply into my research, maybe I see some things, and now my pre-understanding changes as I go to the next thing.

So our horizons can mature. They can get off track or they can get closer to what's truth. - So with horizons, it's not that we would dismiss what a person is saying, but it's that we should be aware of their horizons.

So I think like news reporting, you see this a lot in politics where people are biased. - Do you think? - I think one camp over the other, generally speaking. And so you can see where that bias plays in.

- Well, let's just look at an example. This happened in October of last year of 2018. You had the hearings, confirmation hearings, of Judge Brett Kavanaugh for Supreme Court Justice.

And then you have Dr. Ford, who gets up and says, he sexually assaulted me 30-some years before. And he's denying it and says, I don't know the woman, and well, who do you believe? They're both passionate about what they say. They both are swearing,

they're telling the truth.

And you look and you see in the Senate confirmation hearings that things are split almost entirely along party lines. So if you were a liberal Democrat, you believe Dr. Ford. And if you were a conservative Republican, well, then you believed Judge Kavanaugh.

And again, it was almost 100% along party lines. And if you looked at social media at that point, it was pretty much the same thing around Americans too. If you had liberal leanings, you went with Dr. Ford.

If you had conservative leanings, you went with Brett Kavanaugh. So yeah, our horizons get in the way, and they often compromise our judgments and how we can even assess things. In fact, in a lot of cases, you can't even assess the evidence objectively because your horizons, your biases are so strong and prohibit you from doing so.

- So that might be a case where it's hard to decide well, who's the innocent party here. But in other cases, biases can come forth. So I can think of an example in January, I'll tease another political example.

In January, you had the Covington High School Boys at the Lincoln Memorial. And there was a Native American elder. And the video frame was pictured, snapshot, of the young boy, I forget his name, who was smiling wearing a red Make America Great Again hat.

And the way it was made out in the news articles, on Twitter, all on social media was that, I mean, he was committing a face crime to use the term from George Orwell. That just for the look on his face, he had done something wrong to this Native American elder. And so he just blasted, he and his friends are blasted.

But you watch the video, you see that the Native American man walked into the crowd and that really he was the one that instigated the awkwardness, he was a teen boy, it was just awkward for him, it's not like he was trying to think himself better. So it was the epitome of white nationalism for some people. And so you saw their bias come out, but in this case, we had video to provide better evidence and we were able to overcome the horizon of others.

- Right. - I think that's a good example. That's a very good example.

- So let me ask you this, so I've got a number of questions here about horizons, but what are some ways we can overcome the horizons in authors' work or our own research? - Yeah. Well, I know that when I got into this research on the resurrection of Jesus, I knew that I had my own biases. I knew that my horizon was fully in play in this.

And this is something I didn't realize when I got into it. I got into my study of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection with the objective of proving it, just using a different tool, the tools of a historian to prove it. But as I started studying, I realized that it was my

horizon that actually could get in the way and jeopardize the integrity of my investigation.

So as someone who struggles with doubt, I'm wired to doubt. And it's not just my faith, it's so many insignificant things. - Yeah, that's about marrying Debbie.

- Yeah, no, it's not insignificant. But yeah, I did. I mean, I really thought through it logically and spent a lot of time and effort thinking about it and assessing things.

I mean, I had a file on her. (laughs) I did. - Right, you're proposing cons and lists.

- And pros and cons and all this and Sock Council. And I'd been doing this with other girls for a while too that I took out before I met Debbie. - I was gonna say hopefully prior to Debbie.

- Yeah. - So, and I did some really sharp girls. And some of them, it was just a logical decision.

I could be emotionally invested, but it's like if I didn't think this is gonna work out, I pulled away from the relationship. So yeah, there were some significant things like that that even after making the decision, I doubted. I just have it, it's like, well, what if? What if I made the wrong decision? Even, and it's the same with Christianity, I've looked at it, but what if I'm wrong? The consequences of being wrong pertaining to your worldview are potentially horrible.

So that's what calls a doubt. So when I realized that my horizon jeopardized my ability to do a sound or the integrity of my investigation, I developed certain steps. And a lot of these are already spelled out by philosophers of history and historians.

And so I kind of put these together. And it's like one thing is you wanna subject your, you wanna make your method public so that others can see it. So most historians never do that.

They just say, well, this happened, this didn't happen, and this is why, but I wanted to say from the very beginning, I am biased, I recognize it, and here's the method I'm using. So in how I'm arriving at certain conclusions, that way they could criticize my method. If something's wrong with my method, they could do that.

- So there's two things. There's the method itself as a way of overcoming biases, but then also making known not just your conclusions, but making known what your biases or horizons are. And so you've gotten into, you've done a number of debates with Bart Erman.

And he talks about, well, Mike believes in the supernatural and the historian can't do history that way. I'm just painting with broad strokes here. So he kind of paints that as

being one of your horizons.

- Yeah. - To use that as an example. - And part of my horizon.

- Part of your horizon. - I think it's kind of interesting. I remember being on, with Bart, on Justin Breirely's podcast, Unbelievable, and at one point he accuses me of being biased.

You know, I believe in Jesus 'cause I'm biased, I'm a Christian. And I said, "Yes, Bart, I am biased. "Of course, I am a Christian." So yeah, I've got my own biases.

But you have your biases too. We're all biased. And Justin said to him, "What about it, Bart? "Are you biased?" And he said, "Well, of course I am." So it's like, yeah, we all are.

So I know it's difficult for Bart, but you can't saw off the branch in which you're sitting and remain comfortable. We're all, all of us are biased. And the thing is too.

It impacts us in different ways. So like when I'm doing my research on the resurrection, I'm trying to look at all these different views and to be objective. But at one point I noticed that when I read the views of skeptical scholars, I just kind of, I found myself just glancing over them 'cause I already knew that they were wrong, right? So I'm just skimming through them quickly.

But I realized that this is a problem when I was doing that. You can't do that. So I had to go back and reread those and say, "I gotta be open to what this person is saying.

"If I'm gonna do this with integrity." - Yeah. So peer pressure is a part of that as well. - Absolutely.

- In academia. But there can be pros and cons with peer pressure too. - Yeah, peer pressure.

Peer pressure can, you know, when I'm writing a journal article, I know it's gonna be peer reviewed. I know that people without my biases, the same ones I have aren't gonna let me get away. It's not like I'm just preaching to the choir.

I'm not giving a sermon or teaching a Sunday school class where most people in the room are just gonna be accepting everything I say. So I've gotta cross my T's, I've gotta dot my I's and make sure my arguments are sound. And peer pressure forces me to do that when I know my peers are other scholars who don't have the same horizon, who have different worldviews and biases than I have.

- I wanna ask you about your more recent work, why there are differences in the Gospels. One of the scholars that you sort of look up to is Christopher Pelling. - Mm, yeah, very much so.

- Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but you don't know exactly what his horizons are on

some issues, like I'm not sure if you know. - I don't know if he's a Christian, and I don't know what he thinks about the Gospels or any of that, no. - Right, so in this case though, you probably, I don't know if you sent him a manuscript early or sent him the book itself, but.

- Yes, both, he had the manuscript and he-- - So you saw his feedback? - Yeah, it was, before I asked him to write the blurb, if he'd be willing to do it, I sent him the manuscript and asked him, "Did I get this right on Plutarch? You're the leading guy in the world on Plutarch." And so yeah, he wrote very encouraging stuff back to me and said especially with one of the difficult pericopies, I think the discussions before the Senate in December of 50 BC, which is very, very difficult. The differences that appear even between Plutarch's accounts, what's going on and he said that he thought I handled it really well. So yeah, I don't, I'm sorry, I don't even know why you're asking.

- Because you sort of an outside expert. He doesn't write on the gospels, we're not sure if he's a Christian, but he's an outside source who knows something about that research and so that was one of the ways you were able to overcome your horizon. - Well yeah, that's one of the things I did.

And in fact, I sent it to another friend of mine who is also not a Christian. He's a New Testament scholar and an expert on Plutarch. And I sent it to him because I wanted his feedback.

So yeah, I wanted to send it to unsympathetic peers who are unsympathetic to my cause. Again, well maybe Pelling is, but maybe sympathetic to, I don't know, I didn't know where he was, but certainly the other one wasn't. But yeah, I was really open.

I wanted to see what the experts were saying. - All right, we've got two more points here in your book on overcoming our horizons. So we might get to one here.

- I count for the relevant historical bedrock. What is that? That's a term we haven't talked to you about. The podcast here has been about bedrock.

- Yeah, I guess you could say, well, Gary Habermas calls it minimal facts. People call it different things. I've seen historians refer to it as historical bedrock.

And that would be facts pretty much beyond doubt because the evidence is so strongly evident. The data so strongly supports that fact or that particular fact. And there's different definitions of fact.

So a relevant historical bedrock when it comes to resurrection would be like, okay, Jesus died because you don't have resurrection unless he's dead, right? You gotta die first. And subsequent to that, you've got the disciples having experiences that they are persuaded or appearances that have risen Jesus to them. You've got the appearance to Paul, or an experienced Paul had that he was persuaded was an appearance of the risen Jesus to

him.

So some things like that. So these would be relevant historical bedrock would be facts so strongly supported by the data that virtually 100% of all scholars, including skeptics. So a heterogeneous consensus of scholars would grant them as facts.

So when you're, and the reason you want a heterogeneous consensus, that means you want people who don't agree. You want people all across the spectrum that agree with this because if you've got atheists and agnostics and Jewish and liberal and conserved as all green on the same thing, they may be guided by their worldviews, their horizons. But because they're all arriving at the same conclusion, you know that you're pretty much on, you can have confidence you're pretty much on track.

- Yeah. - So if your hypothesis comes, it can't account for some of the relevant historical bedrock, then there's a good chance you're wrong. - So like Holocaust deniers.

- Yeah. Holocaust deniers, Jesus, mythicists, you know. There's bedrock out there and they have to go to such an extent to try to dismiss the historical bedrock.

Red flags ought to be gone up in your head. If you are trying to be objective. - Yeah, good.

All right, well on next week's episode, we will finish covering a horizons. I'll ask you about detaching from one's bias and other pros and cons to horizons. So I look forward to that.

We do have a question from one of your viewers here. Yiking Wang, if I'm saying that correctly, asks, could it be that Mark was written to summarize Matthew and Luke because he was writing it for a different audience? - Mm. Okay, well that's commonly known as the Greecebach hypothesis.

It's been around for a while. Not too many people take it these days. And the reason being is because Mark really, if you're looking at it that way, and Mark is summarizing, he doesn't contribute anything new, okay, to what Matthew and Luke says.

There's, I mean only a couple of different stories that Matthew and Luke don't include. Plus, so you're saying, well, what, summarizing it, why even do that? And then you're looking at some of the stories that Mark leaves out, like he doesn't talk about the Sermon on the Mount. And a number of major stories he doesn't include, but then he includes some stories that seem insignificant or even strange.

Like the one where Jesus heals a man who's blind and spits in his eyes and makes mud and puts it on there. And then the guy can't see, he's men like trees walking. And so Jesus has to do it again, you know.

Well, why include something like that if you're just summarizing, but not something like

the Sermon on the Mount. And then you gotta look in and say, well, you look at the grammar of Mark compared to what we have in Matthew and Luke. And Mark, you'd have to say that Mark corrupts the grammar.

Mark has awkward grammar. So he takes what Matthew and Luke says and really just makes it sound weird on occasion. It seems much more plausible that Mark has this awkward grammar and then Matthew and Luke corrects and improves Mark's grammar.

That seems to make more sense. So there's various reasons why most scholars today think that Mark was written first, that Matthew and Luke use Mark as their primary source and supplemented him. Got it.

Thank you for introducing us here to Horizons and talking about ways we can overcome them. And I look forward to learning more and thinking about that as well. It's one of the things that I certainly appreciate about you is you try to seek out the authentic answers.

You really wanna follow where the truth might lead and you're aware of those things. I think that's admirable about you. No thanks.

Well, if you wanna learn more about the work in ministry of Dr. Michael Lacona, you can go to RisenJesus.com where you can find those authentic answers to genuine questions about the resurrection of Jesus and the historical reliability of the Gospels. There you can also check out eBooks, articles, videos, all sorts of things, Mike's debates. Just a wonderful resource at that website.

Again, RisenJesus.com. And if you have really been edified by the podcast or now the vodcast here with Mike, would you consider becoming one of our monthly financial supporters? You can do so at RisenJesus.com/donate. Please be sure to subscribe to this podcast on iTunes or the Google Play Store. Like us on Facebook, Twitter, and subscribe on YouTube. This has been the RisenJesus podcast, a ministry of Dr. Mike Lacona.

♪ Life, life, life, life, life ♪ ♪ I'm a man, I'm a donut ♪