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S6E9 - James

September 6, 2021



Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

James, the brother of Jesus, helps to provide to us with significant data regarding the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Dr. Licona unpacks several key passages in this episode relating to James.

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[0:40] Why James is Important

[2:12] Mark 3:20-21

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Transcript

[Music] Hello and welcome to the Risen Jesus podcast with Dr. Michael Lacona. Dr. Lacona is Associate Professor in Theology at Houston Baptist University and he's the president of Risen Jesus, a 501C3 non-profit organization. My name is Kurt Jares, your host.

On today's episode, we look at James, the brother of Jesus and the importance that his conversion plays for the case for the resurrection of Jesus and joining us to help us sift through the data on James is the expert of the program. Dr. Michael Lacona, Mike, good to see you today. Hey, thanks, good to be back.

All right, so here we have James, the brother of Jesus and why is this guy an important figure when we're thinking about the resurrection of Jesus? Well, it seems that by the accounts in our New Testament, James was not a believer during Jesus' ministry, but afterward, he becomes a follower of Jesus. He actually becomes, at one point, ahead of the Jerusalem church and then we have multiple reports that he was martyred. So what would call such a dramatic transformation of being not being a follower of your brother while you are alive, while he's alive? And then all of a sudden after he died, you become a follower to the point of being a willing martyr because you won't deny that your brother is the Lord.

Well, it seems like maybe it was the appearance that Paul reports in that oral tradition in 1 Corinthians 15, it says, then he appeared to James. So James does play an important figure. And like you said, during Jesus' ministry, while on earth, James was not a believer.

And yeah, if the disciples made up this stuff, why would James ever join the Jesus cult?

There's no motivation for him to do so unless something also happened to him. So why don't we run through some verses that talk about James's life and his conversion? Yeah, well, let's look at four of them, four texts in the Gospels. And the first comes from two of them come from Mark two of them come from John.

The first comes from Mark chapter three, verses 20 and 21. And here's what it says, Jesus went home and the crowd came together again so that they were not able to eat a meal. And having heard his own went out to see him for they were saying that he is out of his mind.

Now, most scholars take this as when it's getting crowded so much so that Jesus and his disciples can't eat his family there in Capernaum, because that's where they're at, his family hears about it, and they come to take him away because they think that he's out of his mind. He's just lost his mind on this. It's like, wow, that's strange.

Why would Jesus' family think that he's out of his mind? So is how do we respond to that? And this is just kind of, it does prompt some thoughts. If Jesus truly was born of a virgin, you would think that his brothers and his mother would know about it, of course, especially his mother, but they would know about it. And so why would they think that he'd be out of his mind when he's doing his ministry? But so you've got this embarrassing kind of testimony that his brothers don't even seem to buy into his program.

Now his mother may not either from the text, but it could be that the mother just came along because the brothers were going to get Jesus and she's trying to calm them down. Who knows? I don't want to read too much into this. But at least as brothers are coming to take him because they think he's beside himself.

And this is embarrassing because it's like, well, if Jesus couldn't even convince his brothers, why should I or anyone else be convinced? And to be honest with you, this is like a sticking point for me. This really baffles me. Why is it if Jesus was born of a virgin? If the feeding or turning water to wine in John chapter two is true and Jesus' mother and his brothers were present, the text says, and they would have known this miracle.

Why is it that later on? They think he's beside himself by preaching. And of course, you know, we have these kind of conundrums for a lot of historical things because the text just doesn't tell us everything that's going on in the context. Things are omitted.

Historians are select with what they report. Now I'm not trying to get out of the problem. I still think that there is a tension here and I don't know how to resolve it.

But I also know that the tension is personal and not everybody views the same things as being attention. So years ago, I had lunch with someone who he was a Christian, but he was quite skeptical about just about everything. And we're talking at lunch, we're having

wings together and and he and I he says, do you ever struggle with anything about your faith? I said, yeah, you know, there's some unanswered questions and I brought up this about why is it that none of his brothers appear to have believed in him? And he said, Oh, that doesn't bother me at all.

And here's a guy who's skeptical about everything, everything bothers him, but this did not trouble him in the least. And I said, why not? And he said, look, if I had a brother who was perfect, I would hate him. And it's like, well, that wouldn't be me, but I guess we just have different personalities and you know, so maybe this isn't so implausible after all.

But I mean, it's still a sticking point for me to an extent. There are some scholars who interpret this differently. And I, you know, I look at this and I say, well, there are some different ways to interpret it.

So John Painter is a scholar who does not think there are three scholars who do not think that Jesus brothers were unbelievers drawing Jesus's life. That'd be John Painter, Richard Baucom, and James Tabor. And so I look at their reasons.

I'm not persuaded by their reasons. Baucom told me in person that John Painter was the one who convinced him. And I find painters arguments to be unpersuasive.

They're not persuasive to me, at least. You know, you can look at this and it says, and the crowd came together again so that they were not able to eat a meal. It's referring to Jesus and his disciples.

And having heard his own went out to see him, for they were saying that he is out of his mind. Well, Painter says when it says his own, it's referring to his disciples, his own went out to see him for they were saying, but the text says his disciples were with him. And why would his disciples think that Jesus is beside himself? When it's the beginning of his ministry, why are they going to follow him? They just leave him at that point.

They're not going to come to take him away to protect him from himself. That just doesn't fly well with me. Another way to read it, you could say, is that his family came to get him for they, the crowd, were saying that he's out of his mind.

But that doesn't seem to fit well either because the crowd is there because they're coming to hear Jesus. I think the best way to interpret this text is to understand that there's a crowd there and that his brothers and his mother came to get him because they thought he was beside himself. So it's kind of a tension in the text.

I don't know quite what to do with it, but it's there. It's there to wrestle with. And it's not the only verse though that also lends itself to recognizing that Jesus' family was concerned about how the public would perceive Jesus and their own beliefs about him.

That's right, Kurt. Just a few verses later, a few chapters later, chapter 6 verses 2

through 4. Here's what we read. "A prophet is not without honor," Jesus is saying this.

"A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his house." Now they had just mentioned Jesus and I think they're in Nazareth at that time and they said, "Well, who is this guy? Where does he get this wisdom? Don't we know who his father is? Isn't he the son of a carpenter? And don't we know who his brothers and his sisters are?" And then that's when Jesus says "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown among his relatives and even in his own house." This to me seems to suggest quite strongly that Jesus' household, his brothers and sisters, especially the brothers weren't in his camp. They weren't part of his followers. Yeah, right, right.

So it's right there in the same book written by the same author that Jesus' family is not supportive. His family, generally speaking, maybe there was an exception with Mary, maybe, was not supportive of his ministry work. Yeah, good.

So we've got in John there are some passages as well. So tell me how those are important. Well, first you have John chapter 7 verses 1 through 5 and let me read this because it's good to have the context here.

So here's what the text says. "And after these things, Jesus was walking in Galilee where he was not wanting to walk in Judea because the Jews were seeking to kill him. Now the Jewish booths festival was near.

Therefore his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea in order that your disciples will also behold your works which you are doing. For no one does something in secret and seeks to be in the public eye. If you are doing these things, reveal yourself to the world.

For not even his brothers were believing in him." Isn't that interesting? Pretty clear there is brothers did not believe in him. Well, now painter says that what this seems to suggest is that they just weren't on board completely with his program. That one it says, you know, show yourself to your disciples.

He's referring to his followers in Jerusalem. Okay, we all know in Galilee you do miracles but they don't know those who are following you in Jerusalem don't know because they haven't seen your miracles. Not even his brothers were believing in him.

They weren't believing, they weren't fully into his program. They wanted him to take everything to Jerusalem now. I just, I think it's possible but I do think that's really stretching the text from a surface reading there.

I don't think most people reading the text are going to get that impression from it. And I think there are good reasons to reject that reading of the text. So notice that it says that the Jews in Jerusalem, Jesus was staying in Judea in Galilee because the Jews in

Jerusalem were wanting to kill him.

So then his brothers say, "Hey, why don't you go to Jerusalem and show yourself there?" You know, if you really are doing these things and he uses the term if, if you're doing these things, then why not show yourself to these others for not even his brothers believed in him? It just seems to me that they're talking to him in a sarcastic manner. And then I think that's confirmed in a few other verses that follow. Let me read those to you.

This is John 15, well, it's a little bit later, John 15 verses 18 and 19. And Jesus here says to his disciples later, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before you. If you were from the world, then the world would love its own.

But because you are not from the world, but because you are not from the world, but I myself chose you from the world on account of this, the world hates you." So, you know, that's why people hated Jesus because he exposed their evil deeds. The disciples are going to be hated for that. And just think about it, they weren't hating Jesus' brothers for this.

So I think this text is kind of clear here. It's best read in light of saying that none of Jesus' brothers believed in him. They weren't on board with his program.

And I think that that is further confirmed by it, our fourth text, our second text in John. And that's at Jesus' crucifixion. And there you see Jesus in John, he entrusts the care of his mother to the beloved disciple who's there next to his mother at the cross.

And it's like, well, wait a minute, why wouldn't he entrust the care of his mother to one of his disciples? Well, I'm sorry, to one of his own brothers, like James or Jude or Simon or any of his four brothers. Why not to one of them? Instead, he entrusted to the beloved disciple. Well, it just seems that even by the time you come to Jesus' death, Jesus' brothers still weren't on board.

They still weren't followers of Jesus, even at the time of Jesus' death. And Jesus was more concerned about entrusting the care of his mother to one of his spiritual brothers, one of his disciples, than he was to one of his blood brothers, who apparently none of them were following him even at that point. So I think the cumulative evidence points quite strongly to the position that none of Jesus' brothers believed in him.

They were not followers. James was not a follower of Jesus when at the time of Jesus' death. But it was shortly thereafter in the book of Acts, we find that Jesus' brothers and sisters and mother are gathered together with Jesus' disciples in the upper room at Pentecost.

And then, so in their praying together, which seems to suggest their followers at that time. And then shortly after that, we find James is leader of the Jerusalem Church. He's

making the decisive ruling at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

And then later on, we find reports by Josephus, Hegiscipus and Clement of Alexandria talking about the martyrdom of James, because he won't deny Jesus. So what's the best way to account for this? I think it's the appearance to James that's articulated in that oral tradition in 1 Corinthians 15, then he appeared to James. Fascinating.

Yeah. And so James then serves as another person like Paul, who had not been a believer during Jesus' life. Jesus dies.

Something happens. And then these guys believe. And those serve as really powerful pieces of evidence versus one of the disciples during Jesus' ministry, because these guys wouldn't have made it up.

And they had no motivation to join the Jesus cult. I put that in quotes because sometimes that's what some folks refer to it as. There's no motivation there.

There's nothing in it for them. In fact, the opposite would come that they would be persecuted, that they might die. In the case of Paul, you've got the last we hear is house arrest, but we assume that he died there while in Rome.

And then James, you know, we have, as you mentioned, the record from three different sources of his martyrdom. So again, there's nothing in it for these guys to convert. So why would they? Why would they? What's in it for them? You know, well, yeah, Jesus appeared to them.

That's what that early creed says for James and then Paul himself attests to an appearance in 1 Corinthians 15. So that that lends to the next season, we'll get to the hypotheses that lends to the hypothesis that Jesus in fact, physically rose from the dead. So James serves as a powerful character, a powerful witness there to that hypothesis.

And it's a fact that has to be made sense from these other hypotheses that we'll explore next season. Yeah, let me say two more things about James. One is it does appear that James became a believer after Jesus's death.

We do have a report of an appearance to James of the risen Jesus to James. But we cannot, even we cannot actually show that it was the appearance that led to James conversion. I think that's probably the most plausible explanation.

But there's no way that we can very securely link the two. It could have been that he appeared, you know, to someone else. Another one of his brothers or his mother, I don't know if that were the case.

Why? Why is that not listed anywhere? You know, so it's probably James that led to his conversion and then the others followed his other brothers followed. But anyway, that's

one point I'd like to make. The other point is I don't include the appearance to James in the historical bedrock.

Now, I think Gary Habermas does. He includes it as part of his minimal facts. Let me tell you why I don't.

We do have the large heterogeneous consensus of scholars agree that James had an experience. He was persuaded was the risen Jesus to him. And by far, most of them, about 90% in my count of scholars commenting on it, think that James was a nonbeliever up through the time of Jesus death.

And it was the appearance to James that led to his conversion. Okay. But the reason I don't include it as part of the historical bedrock is because there aren't many scholars who write on it.

I only counted 29. So out of that, you've got three of them who think that James, they don't deny the appearance or the experience that he interpreted as an appearance. They grant that.

But at least two of the three painter and and Balkan do. But losing my train of thought here. So, but James, the conversion experience isn't part of the historical bedrock for you.

It's not it's not a thanks. It's not it's not to me because only 29. You know, the others, you've got many, many, many, perhaps hundreds who comment on the appearances to the disciples, the appearance to Paul.

So you don't have that. Hedger. It is heterogenous.

But I just think, you know, I'm trying to be really careful. And I have these strict the strict methodology in place that's meant to curtail any undue influence of my own biases and worldview on my historical investigation. So I look at it and although it's a heterogenous consensus of scholars, I'm thinking it's there's not too many that that really comment on it.

And therefore I don't include it. Now, in a subsequent publication in the southeastern theological review, the summer 2012 issue, which they can see on my website, risen Jesus calm. Gary Habermas responds to that in my book and he says, well, but that's their problem.

The problem of scholars that they're not commenting on it, those that do comment on it, grant it. If they don't comment on it, that's not our fault. And I agree with him on that.

But I'm approaching this not as an apologist. I'm approaching this as a historian. And I'm just trying to be as careful as possible not to permit my own biases and worldview to

interfere here.

So I'm just putting these really strict rules on my own investigation. And so that's why I don't include it. Understood, understood.

All right. So with a few minutes left here, why don't we take some questions from your listeners first? Let's go with a question here about Dale Allison's new book. Shanta asks, what do you say about Allison's new book, *The Resurrection*? I have seen you interviewing him.

I was wondering in what areas and sense you agree and disagree with his argument? That's a great question. First, I would say that I read Dale Allison's book before it came out. He sent me the manuscript probably close to a year in advance.

And I wrote a blurb for it. Endorsing the book. It is an excellent book.

It's actually a little bit longer, not in page count. The book is larger. Like, I don't know this, you know, from top to bottom and with his book is a little bit larger.

The pages are larger, I should say. And the font is smaller. So actually, if you look at the thickness of it, his book is thinner than mine.

But if you're looking at word count, his book is a little bit longer than mine. His text, the main text is as long as my book is when you include the bibliography and indices. Sure.

So first, what's the gist of his new book for those? He's doing the same kind of historical investigation on the resurrection as I did in mine. Okay. He doesn't follow the same kind of historical method that I do.

And let's just be honest, as I have in previous seasons, there is no set historical method that all historians follow. You know, we all have our own method. And my goal here was to make a strictly controlled historical method that I would make public that seemed reasonable to me and that people could assess and see how I proceeded.

And we all do this, at least we should. But there is no standard historical method that all historians or biblical scholars follow. It just doesn't happen.

Allison has his own. And he does, I think, just a laudable job. He comes up short, I think, from, well, from where I do, he comes up, he doesn't go as far as I do with the resurrection.

And he is a little more skeptical about some things than I would be. I think he sets a bird of proof on time and on occasion. That is maybe a little too strict, a little too skeptical.

But I think he does a great job. He challenged some of the things that he put, has in his book, are quite challenging and has really caused me to think through some things,

rethinking through some things. Like one of the things that he does with the passion predictions about, Jesus' prediction about his death and resurrection.

If I remember correctly, he thinks that Jesus believed his resurrection was going to be the general resurrection, and there would be no two parts. Everything was going to happen. So not only he would be raised at that point, but everybody would be transformed.

All the followers in the kingdom of God would entirely be ushered in at that point in the final day. So at first I thought, "Man, that sounds reasonable. In fact, I might like that even better than the explanation I provided." But then in preparing for the season, I looked and I said, "You know what? I did consider such an option in my big book.

I'd forgotten that I did." And I rejected it. And the reason being, as we discussed in a previous episode here, is because all the passion predictions that we have seem to suggest that it would be just Jesus that would be raised from the dead. Now, of course, you could go back and say, "Well, they adjusted those after the resurrection to make them sound that way." But if you're going to say that, the burden of proof is on you to do that.

So there are some things like that that caused me to think. I will offer a detailed assessment of Professor Allison's book in the future, probably in our next season when we look at hypotheses. I want to go back and reread it.

I do have some initial thoughts on it that I'm not going to share at this point other than what I just shared. I will say that Dale Allison, I think, is one of the finest New Testament scholars in the world today. I think that if you were to survey some of the most elite New Testament scholars in the world and you said, "Who do you think the top five New Testament scholars today are?" At least when it comes to the historical Jesus, Dale Allison's name would appear on that list probably more than anyone else.

I have a lot of respect for the guy and his scholarship. I go further with what I think historical investigation can yield. I do think that he has tended more toward... He's less sanguine than I am about what historical investigation can yield.

He's more leanings toward a postmodernist approach to history than I would have as a critical realist. But he does a fantastic job. Again, I'll come out in our next season.

We'll devote one or more episodes to addressing Dale Allison's book. It's a great book. Anyone who's really interested in resurrection and wants to master the information, Professor Allison's book is a must read.

Along with my own, and I think William Lane Craig's book, assessing the New Testament evidence for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. Very expensive book. That's a must read.

N.T. Wright's book is a must read. Gary Habermas, I still think, is the leading expert, a leading authority on the topic. He has the risen Jesus in future hope, which is a very small book.

But he's working on his magnum opus. That's going to be just a massive several volumes, 5,500 pages perhaps. That's going to make mine look like the reader's digest version.

That will be the ultimate when it comes out, but that's several years out. Good. Yes.

Hopefully he'll finish that before he passes from this life into the next. The good thing about that Kurt is even if he were to die today, he has completed it. It's just now in the process that he's gone through to editing.

That's going to take years, several years. But if he were to die now, his former grad assistant Ben Shaw, who did his dissertation on the resurrection and in himself, he has now shown himself. I think I've read I was his external reader.

He did a great job and he is one of the leading authorities. You may not know his name now, but you will. He is one of the leading authorities.

Even if Gary died today, Ben would finish up the editing and see that that came out. We will be getting it. It's just a matter of when and it's several years out.

It will come out just like Craig Keener's commentary on Acts did one volume at a time and then maybe a year or two, the next one will come out. Sure. Good.

Well, thanks for answering that question about Dale Allison's new book. We've got some more questions from listeners, but we'll get to those in our next episode. If you'd like to learn more about the work in ministry of Dr. Mike Lacona, you can visit RisenJesus.com where you can find authentic answers to genuine questions that perhaps you have about the reliability of the Gospels and the resurrection of Jesus.

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