

# OpenTheo

## S6E5 - Postmortem Appearances

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### Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

Christianity claims that Jesus Christ appeared after his death and resurrection to several parties. Dr. Licona explores the data set we have concerning that claim.

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## **Transcript**

Hello and welcome to the Risen Jesus Podcast with Dr. Michael Hana. Dr. Lacona is Associate Professor in Theology at Houston Baptist University and he is the President of Risen Jesus, a 501c3 non-profit organization. My name is Kurt Cheerus, your host.

Appearances somehow, somehow Jesus died and yet he is appearing to his followers and this poses an intriguing question or maybe a problem for historians, what do we make of the appearances and guiding us through the data on the appearances, the post-mortem appearances of Jesus is the star of this program. Our friend Dr. Michael Lacona, Mike, thanks so much for helping us think through the data set on this for the historical bedrock for the appearances of Jesus. Thanks Kurt, great to be with you again.

Alright, so Mike on today's program, I want you to guide us through the post-mortem appearances, I know before I said the appearances, but the post-mortem appearances of Jesus, of course we could spend ample time discussing the appearances of Jesus, but we really want to know about the post-mortem appearances of Jesus. This doesn't happen all that often where people die and particularly die by crucifixion and then they appear to multiple people and in some cases even doubters, people who didn't believe and we'll get into that. But guide us through here the data set on the post-mortem appearances of Jesus.

Well, our earliest report comes from the oral tradition in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 3 through 8, so it says the Paul has delivered to them around the year 51 when he established the church in Corinth, what he had also received beforehand, most likely from the Jerusalem leadership or deriving from them. The Christ died for our sins, that he rose, was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures and that he appeared. And then the tradition includes a number of resurrection appearances.

So you have to Peter, then to the 12, then to more than 500 at one time he says, then to James and to all of the apostles and then Paul says last of all is to one and timely born, he appeared also to him. So you've got to individuals and to groups to friend and foe alike that is said that Jesus is appearing to them. Alright, so first Corinthians, you know, we've brought that up numerous times over the course of the podcast in multiple seasons.

It is one of the earliest attestations of the appearances of Jesus. Now, I don't know if this would be an appropriate time to get into this. And so feel free to push off this question if it's not.

But when Paul talks about the appearances, what type of appearance is he talking about here in this creed? Is this a spiritual appearance? Is this an existential appearance in our heart? Or does this creed seem to suggest a physical resurrected appearance? Well, I think if we're going to look at it's a fantastic question. And I think looking at what Paul thought, what was in Paul's mind when he mentioned the appearances, that is a very important topic. I don't think this this creed in first Corinthians 15 gives us any insight into that.

You know, it's just it doesn't tell us. He, you know, it's just says Christ died was buried was raised and that he appeared. Now, some will say, okay, well, if it talks about burial and then him being raised, that must be referring to what was buried was raised or is my mentor Gary Habermas has said, what goes down in burial comes up in resurrection.

So that would imply a resurrection, a bodily physical resurrection. The body that's buried is the body that's raised although transformed. So yeah, it doesn't mention an empty tomb.

So, you know, you can't appeal to an empty tomb there. But as NT Wright says, an empty grave even is implied. You know, if you talking about, I think Wright said, if I said I walk down the street, I don't have to say by my feet, you know, because that's implied or you could say if it said that a baby died of sudden infant death syndrome says, you don't have to mention an empty crib.

It's implied. Now, I think those are decent arguments. Ultimately, I don't think they're conclusive when it comes to this creed.

I just don't think there's enough there. I think if I had to put it on a scale, I would say the scale would tilt in favor of bodily resurrection just simply because it does mention his burial and then resurrection. But it does it's not necessarily referring to a bodily resurrection in this creed.

So I just want to be really careful. I want to be careful that I'm not weighing in with my bias so much that it's impacting my investigation. I know, of course, I've biased

everybody's biased, even skeptics or bias, we're all biased.

But if we're trying to get the truth, we want to do our best to to bracket our bias and manage it so that it doesn't unduly influence our investigation. So I don't think that this creed really tells us much about the nature of Jesus resurrection, at least in Paul's view or the view of those from whom he got the creed, the apostles. We're going to have to get that from elsewhere.

So when we're looking at the data set here, we've got first Corinthians 15 and we have the reference to an appearance, but maybe we've got other data in this set that tells us a little bit more. So maybe if we continue on, I think we have some resurrection appearances in Mark and maybe you could tell me about that. No, we don't have resurrection appearance in Mark.

You do have him implied. Okay. So not only does Jesus on multiple occasions predict his death and resurrection, but on one of those occasions, he predicts is the post-mortem appearances as well post resurrection appearances in chapter 14 verse 28, he says, after I have been raised from the dead, I will go ahead of you to to Galilee and there you will see me.

So he is predicting his resurrection appearance to them. Now, why does it mark narrated? Well, that's something for which scholars debate. I would say the, you know, you probably have the majority of scholars who think that Mark ended his gospel at chapter 16 verse 8 and that verses 9 through 20 are not in the original gospel of Mark.

Hardly any scholars think that they're part of the original gospel of Mark. That's where it talks about picking up poison of snakes and drinking poison and you'll be okay. Those are spurious.

They were later added probably sometime in the second century. But now the question is why did Mark end his gospel so abruptly by saying after the angel said, go back and tell that Jesus says, tell the disciples in Peter that he's going ahead of them to Galilee and there they will see him just as he said. And then it says the women fled and said nothing to no one.

They left out, I think it says out of fear and trembling or fear and amazement and said nothing to no one. So why does it end abruptly like that? That's kind of strange. So a lot of scholars think that the ending of Mark either Mark was unable to complete his gospel or that sometime along the way the ending was lost.

So I think that's probably what happened along there. But he doesn't narrate any appearances of Jesus. But the appearance in Galilee is at least implied in chapter 14 verse 28.

Now some scholars will even doubt whether 14:28 was in the original gospel of Mark. But

we really don't have any good reasons for doubting it. All the manuscript evidence would suggest that it's that was in the originals.

The only reason for doubting it would be philosophical rather than historical. Right. So we don't have anything explicit, but we do have something implied and there's something fishy going on there with the ending of Mark and something about the women as well.

And we see here elsewhere and other gospels, the women and their relationship as the early discoverers of well, we'll be getting more into that later on with empty tomb. But there is another appearance that isn't there with the gardener and the women. The gardener and the women.

What you do have in John's gospel, when Mary is inside the tomb, she hears someone outside of the tomb say, a woman, why do you weep? And she thinks it's the gardener. And so she says, you know, where have you taken him? Please tell me where you've reburied him so I can take the body, you know, reclaim the body. Now some have said, you know, this must have just been Jesus must have been and kind of this must have been like in a vision rather than a bodily appearance because Mary didn't even recognize him.

Well, I've been to Israel twice. I've been to the church of the Holy Sepulchre twice. And in that church, you have the ancient tomb in which they believe Jesus was actually buried and from which he rose from the dead.

There's another one called the garden tomb, but most scholars think that it's the church of the Holy Sepulchre that was the actual tomb of Jesus. Well, around there, there's some other tombs that's in the same church. And what you see is that you have to stoop down and crawl inside of those tombs.

I did with one of those. I stooped down, I crawled inside of one of those tombs. And when you look outside, you can't see the person's face.

You might be, I forgot what it was, you might see just up to their kneecaps or their, their hips, but you don't see their face because you are inside of that tomb looking out and it's very dark. So if she heard Jesus saying, woman, why do you weep? And let's say she doesn't recognize the voice, she's not expecting it to be Jesus. You know, it could very easily be the case that she just doesn't see his face.

She just sees the lower half of him. So that's not really a problem. But yeah, you've got the women, you know, they talk about an appearance.

You've got appearance to the women reported in Matthew and in John. But notice something here that's very interesting. The appearance to the women doesn't appear in the early Chorigma, the oral tradition that predates the gospels.

That's found in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 3 through 8. Why is that? Well, because the women in the 1st century, women's testimony wasn't worth much at all. In fact, it would have subtracted from the credibility of the accounts. And indeed, you come to Luke's gospel.

And when the women report that they'd seen angels who said that Jesus was raised from the dead, the Luke reports that the men thought they were telling frivolous tales. And Kelsus in the 2nd century would later go on to really just think the gospel was a message about the resurrection was a scandal because who reported it? Half frantic women, right? So if you're going to invent about the empty tomb and appearances to the initial appearances, why are you going to attribute it to women? You've got Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two Sanhedrists who are already in the story, at least Joseph of Arimathea is in the synoptics and Joseph and Nicodemus in John. Why not have them? They're Sanhedrists.

They're men. They would have been better candidates for talking about an empty tomb and the appearances if you're going to fabricate the story. But you have Matthew and John who are assigning the first appearances of the risen Jesus to women.

Okay. So we've got first Corinthians 15. We've got stuff implied in Mark.

We've got the situation in John and then Matthew with the appearances to women. We have this particular instance in Luke, the Emmaus Road experience where you've got two followers. I can't recall if they're named.

One was a Clopus and the other was anonymous. The other's anonymous. Yeah.

So here you have another strange thing where this guy comes along with them and has a meal and they talk about the scriptures and then poof. It seems that the person disappears. Don't tell me more about that.

Well, yeah. You've got some scholars, many who questioned this and they try to make some theology out of it like, I think it's John Dominiccrossen who says, you know, that you've got the breaking of bread, right? They're sitting down for the meal and it says their eyes were kept from recognizing him. So they don't realize it's Jesus.

He's opening up the scriptures saying that the Messiah had to suffer and die and rise from the dead. And when he breaks the bread because they invite him to eat with them, when he breaks the bread, then their eyes are open and then he vanishes from them. And so some scholars will say, well, this is to take our minds back to the Eucharist, right? Jesus breaking bread and saying, this is my body which is given for you.

Problem is is that there's nothing in that story that would seem to other than breaking bread that would seem to suggest, you know, bring you back to the Eucharist. There's nothing about Jesus' body being broken. It could very well just as easily be reminiscent of

breaking bread for the feeding of the five thousand, right? So I don't really see strong theological overtones in that just because he breaks bread.

That's something you would normally do at a meal. But there is really nothing in that account that would suggest, well, I should say this, that's the only account that we have, which doesn't mean it's false. I mean, you've got a number of unique events reported by a historian and reported by no one else.

That doesn't mean it's false or didn't occur. It just means you can't verify it. And I'd say the same thing with a historian here.

Now, some like Richard Carrier, I've debated him twice. You know, had a good time, you know, collegial time with Richard. He says that the word "clio-pess" means "tell all." And it is to be reminiscent of the, if I remember this correctly, the story of Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome, appearing to a Roman senator named Proculus as he's coming back from Longa Alba, a city which is 12 miles outside of Rome.

He's returning to Rome and Romulus, who had been killed by the Roman Senate during a storm, when lightning struck, that he's appearing to Proculus to give him a message, to give to the Roman people. And he says, Carrier says that this is just a time when Luke is mimicking that story. He's inventing the story.

And that is, you know, you've got all roads lead to Rome, but this is just saying all roads lead from Jerusalem. And whereas the word "proculus" means to proclaim the word "clio-pess" means to "tell all." And that's just all baloney. It really is.

The "proculus" may mean to proclaim, but "clio-pess" does not mean "tell all." "Clio-pess" is shortened just as "mic" is a shortened form of Michael. "Clio-pess" is a shortened form of "clio-patris," which is just a masculine form of "clio-patris." "Clio-patris" means "elustrious father." "Clio-patris" is just a masculine form of that. "Clio-pess" is a shortened form of "clio-patris." So "clio-pess" means "elustrious father." It doesn't mean to tell all.

And the term "all roads lead to Rome" comes from the, I think it's called the "lebrus para," oh, I don't want to botch it. "Parable-arum," something like that. "Lebrus para-able-arum." But that's dated to the 11th century.

So you're about a whole millennium after, you know, when Luke is written. So it just doesn't check out that way. So all we can just say is there's just not enough historical evidence to confirm the appearance to the Emmaus disciples, but it doesn't mean it didn't happen.

Yeah. All right. Now tell me about those who doubted in Matthew 28.

Yeah, that's a fun one. So a lot of said that. It's like, "Okay, well, if Jesus really rose from the dead and appeared to them, it must have been in a vision or something where it was

really difficult to recognize him because some doubted.

How do you doubt if he's standing right in front of you?" Well, that's fairly easy. I've had some different thoughts about it over the years, but I've become pretty settled in what I think the answer to that is what the truth is and what's going on there. The word used for doubting is the Greek word "dhistadzo," which means to think two things.

It's used one other time in Matthew, and that's where Jesus is walking on water, and Peter says, "Lord, if that's you, command me to come," and Jesus says, "Come." And so he starts to walk on water, and he sees the way he feels the way he sees the waves, and he begins to sink. And he says, "Save me, Lord." And so Jesus reaches down and grabs him, and he says, "Peter, why did you doubt? Dhistadzo." Peter was thinking two things. He's thinking, "Wow, this is really cool.

I'm walking on water." But then he sees the waves, and he says, "But how can I do this?" And I should be sinking into this deep water and drowning. So he's thinking two things, but that doesn't mean he's drowning. It's kind of like when Jesus, he comes down from the transfiguration in Mark chapter 9, and there's a guy who wants him to heal his son, who's demon-possessed, and he says, "He's having weak faith," and he says, "Lord, I believe help my unbelief." So that's apostas.

Pistas for faith and ah, mean and negating. So apostas, no faith or unbelief. I believe, but help my unbelief.

It's doubt. And it's the same thing we've got in Luke 24 when Jesus is appearing to them. And it says, "With joy and amazement, they were unbelieving.

With joy and amazement, they were unbelieving." So we don't, shouldn't imagine that they've got their arms crossed and lips pressed. I don't know about this. No, that's not what's going on.

They saw Jesus crucified. They know he was dead, and now the worst thing that had happened on Friday is the best thing. They see Jesus before them.

And now with mouths open, tear-filled eyes, they're thinking that this can't be, but it is out of joy and amazement. They were unbelieving. It's like we would say today, unbelievable to walk off home run in the bottom of the ninth inning of the Game 7 of the World Series.

And so I think that that is what's going on with the doubting. It's the same, even though it's in a different scenario, situation in Luke's Gospel. Luke has it in Jerusalem.

Matthew has it in Galilee. In my book, "Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?" I provide several reasons why this must be the same event. And one of them has transplanted it into a different geographical setting for reasons unknown to me, but it's



got to be the same event here.

And so Luke just uses the term unbelieving. Matthew uses the term doubt. It's just the means to think two things.

It's like, wow, this is just amazing. This is unbelievable. Awesome.

So all right, that's sort of fun to think about. I hadn't thought of it that way before. I had thought these are maybe skeptics who were witnessing, like you said, an an an.

Okay, so. That's possible. But given that I think that this is the same event as Luke reports, and I think there's good reasons for that, I think this is just got, I think this is has to be the right explanation for it.

All right, so let's talk about the other appearances to the disciples and the location of which is there's concern over. But Jesus does appear to his disciples. And I think here the doubting Thomas sequence and tell us more about that and other appearances.

You know, in John, there's a prolonged postmortem appearance. So tell us more about those more at large appearances. Yeah, well, I think it's interesting that, you know, you do have multiple attestation in some of these cases.

So for example, the appearance to Peter, it's all that's in the creed in 1 Corinthians 15, he appeared to Peter. That's the first one. Well, Luke mentions it as well.

He doesn't narrate it. But after the Emmaus disciples come back and tell the story about how Jesus had appeared to them on the road to Emmaus, they say, yes, it's true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.

So that is reported that appearance happened before the appearance to the 12 or the 11 in the case of Luke. So you've got the appearance to Peter that's multiply a tested by Paul, Luke. And it's probably implied in Mark when the angel says, go back and tell the disciples and Peter that he's risen and has gone ahead of you to Galilee there.

You will see him just as he said. So you've got multiple attestation of the appearance to Peter. You certainly have multiple attestation to the 12.

And I take 12 as a nickname there for the core of the most authoritative or closest disciples. Because remember, Judas has died at this point. And he's dead.

And later on, you have Matthias that takes his place. So the 12 are there to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. So it's a nickname, the 12.

So he says he appeared to the 12, but it was actually 11. And even if, you know, in the case of John in the first appearance to the group of male disciples, it would actually be 10 if you if Thomas was absent as well. But it's to the 12 because that's the nickname of

that group, that inner group of representing the 12 disciples.

So the 12 is multiply a tested by, you know, you've got Paul and you've got Matthew. And if Luke is the same appearance, which I think it is, so you know, that's the same appearance. And so, and that's in a different setting.

And I don't think Luke is getting that for Matthew. So that would be multiple attestation. And you've got it in John as well.

So you've got four accounts there, Paul, Matthew, Luke and John that have the appearance to the 12, the appearance to more than 500. That's unique to Paul. But notice it's in the earliest tradition, and it's probably a post ascension appearance.

You got the appearance to James. We don't have that narrated in the gospels. But the book of Acts has that James, Jesus brothers were there and his mother and his sisters were there gathered when the Holy Spirit came down on them at Pentecost when they were all praying.

So by the time Pentecost rolls around, you've got even Jesus brothers at that point who were non-believers beforehand. Now they are believers. And you've got the appearance in that Cretanus is then he appeared to James.

So that was probably a pre ascension appearance. And come think of it, the appearance to the 500 may very well have been a pre ascension appearance. It just comes after the 12, of course.

And then the appearance to Paul, that's post ascension. So yeah, so you've got at least the appearance to Peter and the appearance to the 12 that are multiple attested in a number of sources. Yep.

And that lends to the the credence of the case for historic that this fact, the appearances belongs in the historical bedrock of the case that's being made here. And so yes, we do have a number of appearances that Jesus makes a number. Let me correct myself a number of post mortem appearances that Jesus makes to different people.

But yeah, it's especially the 12 here because it's multiple people in a setting. And this is multiple attested. And so it's not just one person maybe hears him off when can't see him.

And it's not, you know, there's far more credibility to this overall experience. And this experience, this group experience has to be explained in some way as well. And I'm sure we're going to get into that in next season as we evaluate the hypotheses.

But nevertheless, the post mortem appearances of Jesus belongs in this historical bedrock of the case. Say to remember when Paul is reporting this, not as you say, you

know, Paul is reporting this as someone who claims to be an eyewitness of the risen Jesus that he he says, last of all, he appeared to me. So you've got an I alleged eyewitness account here.

And then Paul says he appeared to Peter to the 12. Where's he getting this from? He's getting it from the Jerusalem apostles. He met with Peter at least on two occasions met with Peter the first time according to Galatians one, an undisputed letter of Paul, he met with Peter for 15 days, he met with him visited with them.

Of course, they talked about the resurrection. Of course, he would have learned from Peter firsthand that Jesus had been raised and appeared to them. You're talking about the gospel message.

He 14 years later, according to Galatians chapter two, he goes up to Jerusalem, runs the gospel message past the pillars of the church, whom he names Peter, James and John. So this is a second time meeting Peter. It's a second time meeting James, because he mentioned seeing James and Galatians one.

And now he's in John. It's like, man, this is amazing. He's running the gospel message past them.

And according to 1 Corinthians 15, the gospel message, including the death, burial, resurrection and appearances of Jesus. So we can know that the Jerusalem apostles were actually proclaiming that Jesus had been raised and had appeared to them. So we've got this from people who are claiming to be eyewitnesses, other is in Jesus.

Again, you can dispute whether Jesus actually appeared to them. You can say they were elucidating. You can say that they were lying about it, whatever you want to claim, but they are at least claiming that Jesus rose and appeared to them.

And the fact that they were willing to suffer continuously and willing to die for those beliefs suggests strongly that they actually believed what they were proclaiming. After all, liars make poor martyrs. Hmm.

Very good point there, Dr. Lacona. Thanks so much. And thanks for helping us navigate this data set here on the alleged appearances of Jesus, alleged postmortem appearances.

Man, I struggled with making that distinction this episode. Well, if you'd like to learn more about the work and ministry of Dr. Michael Lacona, you can go to [RisenJesus.com](http://RisenJesus.com) where you can find authentic answers to genuine questions about the historical reliability of the gospels and the resurrection of Jesus. If this podcast has been a blessing to you, please consider supporting our work.

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[Music]