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S6E3 - Jesus Predicts his Death and Resurrection

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Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

Jesus's predictions of his own death and resurrection are of great interest to scholars and debated among them. Is it reasonable to infer that Jesus did, indeed, predict his fate or is it something that was fabricated later? Dr. Licona unpacks these claims.

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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 is the President of Risen Jesus, a 501c3 non-profit organization. My name is Kurt Jares, your host.

On today's episode, we continue talking about the historical bedrock for the life of Jesus and in particular, we'll be looking at his claims for the death and vindication of resurrection that he makes in the Gospels and what the data is there, the historical bedrock is and there are certain arguments to be had going back and forth and I'm not the expert in the room here but our expert is none other than Dr. Michael Lacona. Mike, great to have you here this week with us. Good to be with you.

I guess I am an expert in something else theology but New Testament stuff, you are really the man for the job and so talk to me about the historical bedrock for the life of Jesus, what we call part two here and particularly Jesus' predictions for his death and vindication/possible resurrection. Yeah, well the passion predictions that Jesus would predict at his own death and resurrection is something of great interest to scholars and is debated amongst them. So I think we've got some decent evidence for it.

We can begin by mentioning how the predictions are early. They appear in our first gospel which most scholars believe mark. As we discussed in the previous episode, most scholars, critical scholars, at least those writing in English since 1965 who have mentioned dating of mark.

They think mark was dated somewhere between the years 50 and 70 with most of them in that category putting them somewhere between the years 65 and 70. So that's if we

put Jesus' crucifixion in the year 30 which about half the scholars do, the other put it in the year 33. But so at the very most we're probably looking at 40 years.

Mark being 40 years removed from Jesus' death, his life. So that's pretty early at least by ancient standards. You've got people like Plutarch.

Plutarch is regarded as the greatest ancient biographer and he is writing well with some of the more recent figures those of that great period of time of the transition Roman Republic to the M. Roman Empire. So that's the time when you've got Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus and Brutus and Antony and Cicero fascinating time. He's writing, I mean if you're looking at those events happening ending around 40 BC, Plutarch is writing just after the year or let's just call it the year 100.

That's 140 years later. So for Mark to be writing 40 years later or less is pretty good. Now there's a couple of verses in Mark that are of interest.

So first of all you've got Mark chapter 8 around verse 30 and following. So there you have Jesus predict his death and his resurrection and Peter comes up to him and takes him aside and says no it should, this can't happen like this. And actually in the Greek it says that Peter rebuked Jesus.

He rebuked his Lord. And Jesus turns around and rebukes Peter when he sees the others listening in on the conversation and he rebukes Peter and says get behind me Satan. So it's you've got almost like two elements here.

You've got two elements that are kind of embarrassing. You've got Peter who is regarded as the first leader of the Christian church. And you've got Peter actually rebuking his Lord and then you have Jesus turn around and calling him Satan.

Now if that did not happen if this saying this incident didn't happen it's unlikely that Mark would have invented or whoever if the tradition was before Mark that it's unlikely that they would invented and cast Peter in such a negative light because again Peter is going to be your first leader of the Christian church. So that seems to weigh in favor of its of its authentic being an authentic saying of Jesus. Then one chapter later chapter nine around verse 31 you've got Jesus predicting his death and resurrection again.

And the part where he's predicting his death that he says the son of man will be handed to the hands of men. And you've got like a little play a rhetorical play going on here called staircaseing. So it's like you got the son of man will be handed to the hands of men man men hand hands.

So it's kind of interesting how that happens again that would have been a rhetorical device which would seem to point to it be in an oral tradition of something Jesus an oral reminiscence of Jesus that was prior to the gospel of Mark. So you got staircaseing there you've got the fact that Jesus refers to himself in Mark abundantly as the son of man the

later church does not refer to him in that sense they refer to him as the son of God which in essence means the same thing. Son of man was a divine being that we find in Jewish literature like Daniel seven first Enoch fourth Ezra.

So in essence means the same thing but that would seem to suggest it's got a Jewish root and the son of man that's Jesus favorite self designation. So you've got that you've got the Eucharist sayings of Jesus that is the sayings about the last supper and taking the elements. Not only is that in Mark but it's even earlier in first Corinthians chapter 11 first Corinthians we don't know exactly is written probably somewhere between the years 53 and 56 and Paul is quoting Jesus there and he says I delivered to you what I had also received again these are items words terms that denote the imparting of oral tradition.

So this is stuff saying I delivered you what I had received from the Lord. In other words this is the Jesus tradition that had been passed along to him and then he talks about Jesus sayings about you know this is my blood which is shed for you this is my body which is broken for you. So and so that's very early.

So you have that. So you've got these these loggia the sayings of Jesus that come from Mark 831 Mark 931 you've got the Eucharist sayings. Then you've got some so it's early it's multiply attested by Mark and the Eucharist sayings you could say at least there.

There's an embarrassing element to these because when you look at martyrdom literature it's pretty interesting when you look at like the Jewish martyrdom literature. Second Maccabees chapter seven you've got these seven Jewish brothers and the salucid or Syrian king brings them in because they had weren't following his edict to reject the Jewish eating laws and they weren't eating pork. So he forces them tries to force them to eat pork and they won't do it.

And first brother comes in and he's and the king says to him you know I'm going to treat you brutally unless you fix this this pork meal right now and eat from it. He won't so they peel he orders and the skin is peeled off this guy's head. Well he still won't eat it so they cut his tongue out.

He still won't fix the meal so they chop his hands and his feet off. And when he still refuses to do anything they heat up a red a large pan until it's red hot and throw them in there alive. And so after seeing what they just did to the eldest brother they come to the next oldest brother and they said we will do the same to you unless you fix this pork meal and eat it.

And again he refuses to do it. And they come to the third one after treating the second one the same one. And basically he just won't do it.

He says you know in essence it's either the third or fourth brother that says you know

king I'm going to receive these things that my tongue and my hands and my feet. I'm going to receive them all back in the resurrection. But for you king there will be no resurrection.

So he's trash talking the king. But what's really interesting is in the account he says this these things after he had his tongue cut out. So you know there's no way this happened.

You can see either this entire entire story has been fabricated or it has really been doctored up in order to make these guys you know super heroes probably to encourage others who might find themselves in similar situations. So we find that in the second Maccabees we find another story in I believe it's also in second Maccabees where no it's fourth Maccabees where you have LEA's are and they burn him with fire and then they pour fluids with a horrible stench they pour that down his nostrils and then they burn him to the bone. And just before he dies he basically says God I have not forsaken your law.

And then you've got people like Stephen and Acts chapter 6 and 7 the Christian martyr who you know is very bold through being stoned to death. He asked God to forgive them and you find Rabbi Akiba Jewish martyr who was tortured to death. And you know all these guys, Hennina, Ben, Taradian, all these guys that in the Jewish martyrdom literature they're tortured to death but toward the end I mean they willingly go into it and then you know they're bold into it.

You know rax and stones may break my bones but resurrection awaits me that kind of stuff. And at the end they basically say they pray to God and they say God I could have forsaken your law but I haven't. Now contrast that with Jesus he's in the garden.

He wants out if possible. Father of it your will let this cup pass from me. You know he's really sweating over the impending punishment he's going to endure.

That would have hardly been encouraging to those disciples to whom he had said you know who knows how you know just a little bit before then if you want to be my disciple you have to be willing to take up your cross and follow me. And then when he's on the cross he doesn't say God I have not forsaken your law. He says my God why have you forsaken me? So these are like this is like it would have really been.

They are not airbrushing out of their texts. These items that would have made Jesus you know look real. You know not stuff that had been embellished.

It's like they're reporting the good the bad and the ugly. And so this gives us confidence that they are at least the synoptic gospels. John seems to have airbrushed a little of these things out of the garden scene but at least the synoptic gospels they're reporting these things you know even the stuff that would have been embarrassing to the earliest Christians embarrassing when compared to the Jewish martyrs reports of the Jewish martyrs.

So those are just two reasons right there. You've got in fact that it's early and they have you know embarrassing nature to it. There's some other reasons as well but those are two right there that would suggest that the Jesus predictions about his death and resurrection are authentic.

So what are some of the concerns that critics may raise? What seems to be the big deal here that because Jesus makes these predictions and it happens that it somehow gives credence to the reliability of the story. What's in it for the critic? A critic would say well you know this would have required predictive powers and they don't believe in the supernatural. They don't believe that Jesus was a prophet or son of God you know in that in a divine sense.

So if he wasn't he wouldn't have had these predictive powers. But you know what even though it's not to rule out predictive powers I don't know that you would need predictive powers for some of this. I mean Jesus saw his wingman John De Baptist who is out proclaiming you know the kingdom of God was coming who's pointing to Jesus John De Baptist is arrested and executed and Jesus is preaching the kingdom of God is in him.

And you know he's even warned about Herod and people are trying to trap him and he's continuing to do stuff. So he must have figured that if he continued on this path it was eventually going to lead to his execution. So you could make these passion predictions without being a prophet.

It's like if you are a missionary and you were preaching Christianity's true and Jesus is the son of God risen from the dead and you're doing this in the midst of al-Qaeda territory. You know it doesn't take you having supernatural powers if you were to predict your forthcoming execution. You know now resurrection would be a little bit different but of course you could believe that you were going to be raised from the dead shortly thereafter and be deluded on it so you could you could think you're going to die and rise from the dead and be correct about the death part but not about the resurrection part.

So the objection that it would require supernatural powers and you're rejecting the supernatural powers is not a very good reason for rejecting these because you wouldn't really need supernatural powers to do that. Now if Jesus actually did rise from the dead then it's probably attributed to supernatural powers but it's not necessarily so. So that would be one thing.

Another would be that Jesus never really thought that he was going to be killed. He believed that he was going to usher in the Kingdom of God now you know during his lifetime and but he didn't. He failed as Messiah and so the church the Christians made these fabricated these saints in order to avoid the embarrassing nature of stuff.

But I don't think this is a good reason to reject the historicity of the Passion Predictions either because the Gospels report many embarrassing things about the Gospels in Jesus.

They say that not even Jesus brothers believed in him. Well gosh if his brothers don't even believe in him and they knew Jesus why should I right? They must know him better than I will ever will because they were brought up with him.

So that'd be one thing. Why mentioned that his brothers didn't believe in him? And we find that in John chapter I believe it's seven and toward the end of I believe it's Mark chapter three but I'm not sure. It says that his brothers thought he was beside himself.

I mean that's kind of embarrassing. You've got so his brothers didn't believe in him. You've got Peter call you know saying not to and you know that he's not he can't die and and Jesus calling him Satan.

You've got women being the discoverers of the empty tomb while the men were in hiding. You've got I think it's Mark chapter three verse 32 where Jesus says he doesn't know when he's going to return. Well Mark's presenting Jesus as being God's uniquely divine Son of God and he doesn't even know when he's coming back.

So I mean and you got all the Gospels are presenting Jesus disciples as knuckleheads who just don't get things at times. So when they should and Jesus has to rebuke them and call them men of little faith. So if the Gospels aren't going to be hesitant to refer to give stories and details that would have been kind of embarrassing in nature to Jesus and his disciples.

I just don't see where they would feel that they have to in fabricate Jesus predict in his death and resurrection if he was a failed Messiah. So and that really also just passes over the historical evidence we have that Jesus actually did predict his imminent death and subsequent resurrection. So that that be some things and then you have to ask the people who are responding in this way objecting.

You know you think the Christians are biased could it be that you have some bias as well and could it be that your bias is motivating you to reject the authenticity of these predictions of Jesus about his death and resurrection because it's just not palatable to you. You don't like what it could mean. So that's another.

The one that I find most persuasive and find that I have to wrestle with most is that the disciples didn't seem to anticipate that Jesus was was going to rise from the dead. It seemed like a shock to them and that's kind of strange I think if Jesus actually predicted his imminent death and resurrection as much as the Gospels report him doing then why is it that they weren't thinking about the why is it that they don't seem to be expecting it. So I mean we can just look at a couple different solutions for that but the one that I guess that I find perhaps well Dale Allison recently said in his book and it's a fantastic book on the resurrection just came out the spring of 2021.

He allowed me to read it in view of writing a blurb and endorsement for it and I read it it

really is an excellent book. It's well done very scholarly. I mean it's scholarship at the highest level.

It really is. It's a great book. I don't agree with a number of things in it and we could talk about that another time but he thinks that when Jesus predicted his death and resurrection his resurrection that he was referring to the general resurrection as a single step rather than two step as the Paul presents it later on.

Jesus now and then the rest everybody else when Jesus returns. He says that Jesus and his disciples viewed the general resurrection and the Jews as being the last day is going to be a single step and so when Jesus referred to his resurrection he was thinking it was going to be the general resurrection everybody was going to be raised on that day. And you know that sounded pretty good to me at first.

As I think about it though it just seems that that doesn't really fly well with Jesus predictions that we find reported in the gospels. All of them seem to be pointed just to him rising from the dead and just him. He's not saying you know three days later we will all be raised.

He's saying you know I'm going to die and then I'm going to be raised three days later. So you know of course you could say well the church just changed that afterward but where's your evidence for that. I mean that's just pure speculation.

It's not to say that it couldn't happen that way. It's possible. But I just think it's probably more likely that the reason they weren't anticipating it is because for one they they really balked at the idea of the Messiah dying and rising.

They wanted God's kingdom to be ushered in now so that they could be free from Roman domination. That's not what Jesus was presenting them. And maybe they were hoping that Jesus would change his mind later on.

I mean when you got Peter saying you're going to I'm going to Lord you said you're going to die and rise three days later. No don't that that can't be that way. I mean they're taking that as just Jesus saying he's going to be raised.

Right. And that appears to be an authentic saying of Jesus because of the embarrassing nature of it. Plus it's early it's in Mark.

So I think that militates against a view such as what Alison holds. That everything seems to be point to Jesus. But I think it's some you know maybe maybe Jesus predictions weren't quite as crystal clear as we find them in the gospels.

Maybe they may have been. But there might have been a little ambiguity to it. And then the disciples weren't really open to dying and rising Messiah.

They wanted something else. They were hoping that Jesus would change his mind or that he was wrong. And it was only later after he'd been raised from the dead that they just came to understand that this was necessary.

Yeah. So that's what I would surmise is the reason why they weren't anticipating that Jesus would come back from the dead. Yeah.

And in the chapter here in this section you do provide some other possible or even plausible other possibilities you know that could have happened. But you know as you've just stated you think the best reason here is their expectations were far different. We're coming to a close here.

But before we do I want to take a question from one of your listeners Mike. He calls himself banjo skeptic on Twitter here at banjo atheist. Big issue for me as a skeptic Luke says many had written about Jesus.

We also think there's Q. So we know that there's lots missing from the record. How do you know that that stuff wouldn't hurt you or presumably means hurt your case. Or is your resurrection belief more a pragmatic ascent? Hmm.

That's a fair question. I guess the truth of the matter is there could be some something that would overturn what we believe. I mean we know that you know Paul wrote some other letters that we don't have today at the end of Colossians.

He talks about a letter to the church at Laodicea. We know that there was a letter that he wrote to the church at Corinth before 1 Corinthians because he eludes to that letter. So what if one of those letters lost letters of Paul turned up.

And it said something that would just totally would give such illumination to the whole thing. It would tell us for certain that Christianity was false. You know.

What if the Q document were discovered and you know it had some things in it that we don't find in Matthew and Luke. And that really something like some had said Jesus had been raised but he really wasn't. This is what happened instead.

You know. What if we had something like that. Well you know we can't rule out the possibility of something like that as historians.

But we don't have to wait based on you know what if. I mean you could say well there's scientific laws or beliefs that we have today that we hold really strongly. Well what if in the future we find that there is something else that overturns us.

Well that's possible but we don't have to wait for that to reject what we presently believe. You know we believe right now that you know we perceive reality relatively accurate at you know relatively accurate. The external reality is as we pretty much as we

perceive it.

But is it possible that we're all just brains and vats being stimulated by a mad scientist to have these external present. But you know I can't really look at that as a serious live option. I've got to look at data to support things.

And we do have multiple data like from Paul you know you'd still have to say well why did Paul convert to Christianity. That has to be answered. What was the nature of these experiences that led so many people to believe the risen Jesus had appeared to them despite seeing him executed in a very brutal manner.

Again with Paul he's the most important one here because he was out persecuting the church and then he makes an about face to the point where he's proclaiming the risen Jesus. Telling people to repent and become followers of Jesus and he does this to his own harm. Shipwrecked beatings and prisoners and eventual beheading martyrdom.

So you know what would cause this you have to account for those things. So while we could say that there is a very small remote possibility that some of these lost letters would you know lost documents would disprove or overturn what we currently believe about Jesus. You know wise people look at probabilities and we look at all the data that we have and the data we have is quite strong.

At least strong enough that the heterogeneous consensus of historians of Jesus grant things like that he died by crucifixion that he was known as a miracle worker and exorcist that he believed himself to be God's eschatological agent that he died by crucifixion that he taught in parables and things like that. Now I do want to say this before we close we talked about Jesus predictions about his death and resurrection that does not belong to historical bedrock by the way. Because even though I think the evidence for it is every bit as strong as some of the other it's not granted by a heterogeneous consensus of scholars today.

So I don't include it in the historical bedrock. Interesting. Yeah and you know I just wouldn't have a problem with people having predictive powers.

I mean there are some people that predicted the housing crash you know back in what was that oh eight oh nine there are people that saw it coming and yeah like you said I mean Jesus could have seen John the Baptist and thought hey that's my that's my impending fate. So no problem there. And do to at banjo atheist right yeah Mike you mentioned Luke you know here that Luke mentions there are many sources.

Well if you think if you go back to season two of our podcast if you think Luke wrote third of the synoptics it could be referring to Mark and Matthew and maybe one other that was out there. So it doesn't seem probable as you mentioned it doesn't seem probable that there's going to be something that really throws a monkey in the wrench here. And so

yeah great I'm glad you could help guide us through those thoughts Mike it's always nice to hear your perspective on some of the questions from your listeners.

And also too as we're working through the predictions that Jesus made about the death and his coming resurrection and how that plays into the overall case being made here. And in this particular instance yeah you see hey this doesn't really fall within the bedrock but it's still valuable and you know I think it's historical but it's not part of this case that's being made here as these these minimal facts go on. And so looking forward to even meteor material coming up in the coming weeks as we look at the Jesus' death the appearances Paul you brought up and James we've got a lot of great content coming forward looking forward to those conversations with you.

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