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S6E6 - Jesus Appears to Paul

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Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

Paul's eyewitness account of Jesus provide us with some of the most compelling evidence within the historical bedrock. Dr. Licona unpacks these appearances from Paul's writings.

[0:00] Intro

[1:04] The Reasons Paul Relates to Historical Bedrock

[5:13] Saul VS Paul

[6:29] Paul as Eyewitness

[9:45] Paul's Revelation

[12:54] The Son Revealed IN Paul

[15:43] "Last of all...he appeared also to me"

[21:23] 2 Corinthians 4:6

[24:05] 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

[27:04] Viewer Question: What scripture is Paul referring to in the creed in 1 Corinthians 15?

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Transcript

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 of 501c3 Nonprofit Organization. My name is Kurt Chirus, your host.

He was using the words of Bruce Springsteen, blinded by the light on this episode we're going to be talking about Paul of Tarsis and the important event that happened in his life that led to his conversion to the Christian faith and the importance that Paul plays in the case for the historical bedrock pertaining to Jesus and the case for the resurrection. And so joining us to help guide us through Paul and talking about Paul's life and his ministry and the important events in his life are the expert of the program. Dr. Michael Lacona, Mike, great to have you on the program today.

Thanks Kurt, it's fun to be back. All right so for you Paul is huge in the case for the resurrection. You frequently cite Paul as the early player, his writings are predate the gospels, generally speaking, and you frequently cite First Corinthians 15 Galatians and so Paul's a big player for you.

Why should we be paying attention to Paul when we think about the historical bedrock for Jesus? It's a great question Kurt. The reason is Paul is so important. Well there's a number of reasons.

Number one he claims to be an eyewitness of the Risen Jesus. Now you say well yeah but there were plenty who claim to be eyewitnesses of the four gospels. You have Matthew and John that the early church tradition attributes them to the apostles Matthew and John and they would be eyewitnesses.

That's correct. However scholars hotly dispute whether Matthew and John actually wrote

those gospels. That doesn't mean that they didn't.

I think we can give some good arguments that they were. The authors are at least intimately involved in the composition of those gospels. Okay but it is hotly disputed.

When it comes to Paul of the 13 letters attributed to him in the New Testament scholars debate over the authorship of six of them but seven of them are considered undisputed letters written by Paul and from his undisputed letters you can get a lot about the resurrection from Paul. So even if you even though scholars will dispute again the authorship of Matthew and John being written by eyewitnesses they don't for these seven letters of Paul. So that's one reason.

So when you're doing historical investigation you're on a little more solid ground historically speaking for your investigation by looking at Paul. Unfortunately he doesn't give as much information but the information he does give is very good. Another reason is because Paul was a non-believer when he had an experience that he sincerely believed was in a was an appearance of the risen Jesus to him and converted to Christianity a Christ follower as a result.

So it's not as though you've got these biased disciples out there who well they just say Jesus rose from the dead. No he was out persecuting Christians consenting to their executions throwing them in prison and then he became one. He did a 180 degree about phase.

So that's another reason. Another thing is through his writings as we saw in the previous episode or at least one of the previous episodes I kind of get lost with these. We saw that the oral tradition contained in them can be traced with a reasonable degree of confidence, a high degree of confidence to the Jerusalem apostles those who had known and had been with Jesus prior to his death.

In fact we know that he even met with some of those apostles the pillars of the church Peter, James, the brother of Jesus and also John. So Paul is just a super source for us. So what we can glean from his undisputed letters about the resurrection is going to be of vital importance.

Yes indeed and I also agree that you know if the disciples were to have just made this stuff up Paul never would have converted. There's something special about his experience that led him to convert to the the very faith that he was persecuting and that is a huge factor when we want to consider the case for the resurrection here. So I just want to cover a few things before we go further into this.

Some people might be confused about Saul and Paul in that relationship with the names. It wasn't quite the same thing with Abram and Abraham where there was a formal name change or Jacob and Israel right. God sort of changed those names for those men but

that's not the case with Saul Paul is it? No I'll be honest with you I haven't really looked into that but my suspicion uneducated suspicion at this very moment would be that Saul would have been Paul's Jewish name and of course that is the case and then when he came to Christian his name was changed to he got a Christian name Paul so it was similar but it was more of a Christian name and that would have been more of you know something that would have been an alignment with that Greco-Roman culture in which he ran and he was I mean Paul says that he was called to preach to the Gentiles so they gave him more of a Gentile name.

Yeah yeah okay all right and then kind of like today when someone converts to Islam you'll see them change their name right? That's true yeah yeah okay so then also you said earlier that Paul claims to be an eyewitness and I know we're gonna get into this and maybe this is this is a good segue to the talking about the appearances or the appearance that we're not talking exactly about the same thing here when we talk about an eyewitness that the the 12 recognized so Paul's experience was something a little different than the glorified physical body appearing on the Damascus road and I mean there's you know some debate over what that was like so I'll let you take it over from here and guide us through the different texts that talk about the appearance to Saul on the Damascus road. Okay well actually you know whether Paul's experience was different different from those of the disciples of Jesus who had walked with and during his ministry is actually the matter to be that is debated among scholars a number of scholars. They'll interpret Paul's text in a sense to say that he his experience of the risen Jesus much like what we see Luke narrates in the book of Acts was more of like a heavenly vision and so what some of these scholars will do is say well the nature of the appearance to Paul was the same as the nature of the appearances to the disciples it was more of a heavenly type vision and so therefore the Gospels are just later inventions when they talk about an empty tomb a physical bodily appearance of Jesus it wouldn't have been that way they wouldn't have been able to touch him that wouldn't have been a bodily thing it would have been some heavenly vision outside of space time and so again that's another reason why Paul is important Paul is probably earlier than he's writing earlier than the first gospel mark and so we're we're going to look at him and remember we can verify as we did in previous episodes that Paul is proclaiming the same gospel message as the Jerusalem Apostles so and and we see in 1 Corinthians 15 in verse 1 he says I want to remind you the gospel message that I preached to you and then he goes on to give us an outline of that message and it includes the resurrection and the appearances so if they're verifying his gospel message and that includes the resurrection and the appearances and if Paul's appearance is the same kind of nature as that of the Jerusalem Apostles well if Paul's the nature of the appearance the Paul is one of a heavenly vision that would mean that he and the disciples were teaching that the appearances to the disciples were one of a heavenly vision outside of a space time and again the gospels would be you know later legendary mythical stories they would not be reflecting truth in the resurrection narratives so yeah that's why his his what he says

about resurrection is so important yeah okay so why don't you guide us through some of the texts here on what Paul claimed about the appearance sure well first one we can look at his Galatians chapter 1 verses 1 through 11 and let me just read a couple verses out of that he says for I make known to you brothers that the gospel being preached by me is not according to man for neither from man did I receive it or was taught it but through a revelation of Jesus Christ but when the one who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through his grace was pleased to reveal his son in me in order that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles I did not consult immediately with flesh and blood nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those Apostles before me so there's two sticking points in this text that on which we can focus the first is that he says that the gospel he received the gospel through a revelation of Jesus Christ and the word apokalupsis the Greek word apokalupsis is used there it's the same one that is used for apocalypse meaning they revealing and it's like the book of Revelation so they will say see it's it's an apocalypse it's a revelation and Paul John says that he's receiving this in a vision a dream a vision and so this is what Paul had here is referring to a vision it wasn't a real parents and they use this in a sense many of them the more skeptical stripe will say a vision can easily be confused with the hallucination so that's one thing the problem with that is with that hypothesis is that Paul uses the term apokalupsis on a number of occasions of four occasions to be precise and at least three of those occasions and possibly the fourth he is referring to he is using it to describe the second coming of Jesus so it's a revealing and the revealing of Jesus in the second coming the power of Sia is one that it's physical he's coming back with his angels on the clouds of heaven the trumpets going to sound you know and so forth it's a physical kind of thing so that everyone will be able to see at that time so at least in that sense it doesn't Paul isn't seem appearing to be using it as you know a revelation in a dream outside of space time so now that's not necessarily to mean that it's not outside of space time it's just to say that there's too much ambiguity in the use of that term to to state with confidence that it's being made he's referring to one or the other in or outside of space time you just have to leave a question mark there and good hermeneutical method will interpret vague or ambiguous text in view of clearer ones and so we'll just have to at least as far as that's concerned we have to bracket that the other sticking point in this text is when he says that God was pleased to reveal his son in man yeah not to but in that's right and the Greek there is an m why so and the preposition in am I me so but that preposition and it can mean in it can mean by it can mean a whole lot of different things you learned the word in actually you learn in and some others in your first year of Greek your first semester of Greek it's part of the vocabulary you use and what's interesting and so it's got a variety of meanings to it and in fact just a few verses later in chapter 1 verse 24 and I think this one the one we're looking at is 16 I believe somewhere around there but in in chapter 1 verse 24 he says they were glorifying God and am I because of me and then in first Corinthians 14 11 Paul says I will be a barbarian to the one speaking and the one speaking a barbarian and am I to me so again there's a variety of meanings in the and am I to translate it and require in me is not reasonable it could mean that but again

in this verse it's just far too ambiguous in order to assign a a a a a meaning to it with a great deal of confidence it could mean in me it could mean to me in fact some English translations render it as to me some as in me so again there's just too much ambiguity here I don't think that this text gives us much information I mean it does tell us some it's just the meaning is too ambiguous Paul is ambiguous here it doesn't help us a whole lot in terms of what Paul thought about resurrection yeah I find that the in me translations certainly give off a more Christological teleological sense that our our purpose as Christians is to become like Christ so when God revealed Christ in me there's sort of a fulfillment of God's design for humanity but you're right in terms of determining if Paul's meaning to convey a historical truth about the revelatory experience that's hard for us to figure out so we have to maybe look at other texts elsewhere thankfully there are more texts so why don't you tell me more so for example first Corinthians chapter 9 verse 1 Paul says have I not seen Jesus our Lord but it doesn't tell us anything about the nature of the appearance it just says that you know Paul says that Jesus appeared to him okay there but it doesn't tell us anything about the nature of the appearance so then we can go to first Corinthians chapter 15 verse 8 we looked at this a little bit in a previous episode and Paul says and last of all last of all as to one untimely born he appeared also to me Paul says so this really doesn't tell us much about the nature of the appearance to Paul it just says he appeared to him he died I think we mentioned this in a previous episode the oral tradition there in three through seven says he died was buried was raised and appeared and it could certainly as many scholars have said because it's talking about death burial resurrection it's like Gary Habermas is what goes down and burial comes up in resurrection that would seem to be a natural implication here which would be referring to the corpse being raised and then that transformed body the resurrection body appearing to others but it's not necessarily so so it that doesn't really tell us a whole lot about the nature of the appearance maybe nothing if anything it leans toward in my opinion a physical bodily resurrection but in a weak sense you could say but there is one element in this verse that is important for what we're looking at today and that is that term appeared last of all he appeared to me that term in the Greek is the Greek it's an erist passive indicative so erist meaning like a past tense passive meaning is happening the the action is happening to the subject or which would be Paul there and then indicative you know well I can have different meanings okay but it corresponds to reality pretty much so you'll find a number of scholars that focus on that term in the Greek it's the term oph they oph they and they'll say yeah but when that's used usually almost it almost always refers to the appearance of a divine heavenly being to someone and sometimes it happens within a vision so again they use this to suggest that these appearances occurred within a heavenly vision and now someone would say well you know that's that's not too bad I mean if we read about Paul's the appearance to Paul and Acts it does seem like a heavenly vision it's not the same kind of appearance that we read in the gospels it is post-essension you have a glorified Jesus in heaven who's appearing to Paul and so it's not so out of line with that kind of interpretation what the challenge here becomes though Paul uses that term for the other appearances as well

he appeared to Peter then he appeared to the 12 he appeared to more than 500 at one time then he appeared to James then to all the apostles last of all he appeared to me it's oph they all these times so if it's a heavenly vision for Paul then it's a heavenly vision he's referring to the others as well if that's what the term oph they must mean but it doesn't mean that all the time it comes from the Greek term horado in the present tense present active indicative 10 mood is horado and that can mean just normal scene and if you want to be a stickler and say yes but Paul is using the erist passive indicative here all you have to do is do a word search for oph they throughout the ancient literature now I subscribe to the digital lobe classical library series and so I can do word studies like that in the term oph they appears lots of times in the ancient literature and just a lot of times a lot of times it it's referring to just normal appearances so for example in Plutarch's life of Cicero the term appears three times in that biography and on one occasion it says that Plutarch says that narrates that when Caesar went to Spain Cicero sailed to where Pompey was and when the followers the followers of Pompey were glad when Cicero appeared oph they certainly not the appearance of a divine being in a heavenly vision it's just a normal appearance so you know they just some just want to make too much out of that term oph they and and they shouldn't because there's nothing there it's a nothing burger right so there's nothing really in first Corinthians 15 8 that would when Paul says last of all he appeared to me there's nothing that tells us about the nature of the appearance yeah okay so what else do we have surely there's more here I know there's some verses and acts which we may get around to any other appearances outside the book of Acts in Paul's writings where he told you yeah yeah several more so first example there's second Corinthians 4 6 and Paul there says for for God the one who said light will shine out of darkness is he who shines in our hearts with light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ now notice here he's shining in our hearts it'd be like person saying yeah Jesus rose from the dead not in a a literal physical bodily sense he he he's risen from the dead in that he's still alive in our hearts and that's how they will interpret some scholars will interpret that that text but a number of scholars do think that that's how Paul is describing the appearance of resurrection appearance of Jesus to him but that this is very unlikely and the reason being is remember Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15 8 last of all last of all as to one untimely born he appeared also to me so whatever the nature of the resurrection appearances that Paul is referring to in that text to Peter to the 12 to more than 500 to James to all the apostles and to him what the kind of appearances that that was that those were different I mean that was it that differed from anything else one might say like Jesus appears to Paul elsewhere in visions Paul reports at least in the book of Acts right that he appears to Paul a few other times in visions but that's not an appearance of the risen Jesus to him the same kind is what Paul's referring to in this oral tradition in 1 Corinthians 15 3 3 8 so Paul then establishes the church in Corinth most scholars think around the year 51 and then when he's writing a second Corinthians which is most scholars are placing dating somewhere between the years 55 and 58 when he says he that he shines Christ shines in our hearts our it's plural so this can't be the same kind of

of experience that Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 15:8 because they became Christians after Paul established that church in Corinth no earlier than the year 51 long after Paul's conversion experience you can look at 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verses 2 through 4 that's where Paul has this you know caught up in the third heaven he says this I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago whether in or out of the body I do not know God knows was taken up to the third heaven and I know such a man he's referring to himself of course I know such a man whether in or out of the body I do not know God knows he was taken up into paradise and heard inexpressible words that are not permissible for a human to utter again a number of scholars will contend that this may very well be Paul describing the resurrection appearance of Jesus to him because they want to think of it as a heavenly vision outside of space time rather than something like would be narrated in the gospels but this seems extremely unlikely because the timeline doesn't match up so just for example again I said first second Corinthians most scholars think was composed by Paul somewhere between the years 55 and 58 so let's just take the most favorable date to that hypothesis that this is Paul's conversion experience and that would be the earliest date 55 and let Paul says here 14 years ago so let's back it up 14 years 55 minus 14 you come to the year 41 and that is way too late because Paul's conversion experience would have been before that we know this because in Galatians chapter 1 and or 2 I should say Galatians chapter 2 Paul says 14 years later perhaps referring after his conversion it would seem 14 years after his conversion he goes up to Jerusalem and it seems to be talking about the Jerusalem Council which occurred no later than the year 49 so 14 back that up 14 years from 49 and what do you got 30 35 35 yeah more reasonable with the other chronology that we have details in the book of Acts following that chronology yeah so it doesn't it doesn't match up the chronology Paul when you consider how Paul talks about going up to Jerusalem and Paul having his vision it doesn't match up in term the chronology doesn't match up if you're trying to argue that this is Paul's the appearance of Jesus to Paul which led to his conversion yeah so so we've got the yeah the reference there in 2nd Corinthians is surely not that conversion experience he uses other terms and other passages to talk about that experience and on next week's episode we're gonna hit the book of Acts here and we're running long time I do want to take one question from one of our listeners Chris who asks here about the the creed from 1st Corinthians 15 and he's wondering what is Paul referring to when he says according to the scriptures which scriptures in particular is Paul referring to yeah that's a great question it really is and it's a difficult one to answer and it the only clues that I mean you got different scholars answering differently to me it seems like I mean it's common to say Jose a 6:2 but that's never appealed to in the book of Acts or elsewhere you know clearly it's never appealed to clearly to refer to Jesus's resurrection so I don't think that's what is in mind so what's scriptures well the ones that are cited in in the book of Acts is there are two of them Acts chapter 2 verse 7 where it says you are my son today I have begotten you and what Paul is doing there is repurposing the scripture because that is originally was written as a coronation him a coronation him to be sung to the new Israelite king and so Paul repurposes that in order to say God to say and you are

my son today I have begotten you I have given birth to you I've given life to you by rising you from the dead because you are my son the other scripture is Psalm 16 10 where it says you will not allow your holy one to see decay or I think it's in the Septuagint it says to see to see the grave either one it would mean the same thing to die or yeah so it's it's supposed to be a psalm of David at least this is what Paul or Luke assigns to him in the book of Acts a psalm of David so David is in the midst of his life being pursued and he's telling God in this song that he's confident that God will rescue him because he will not allow his holy one that is David to see decay to die and his body decay Paul repurposes that scripture to refer to the resurrection and he says look this can't be referring to David because David died and he was buried his body decayed we know where his grave is to this day but Jesus died was buried his body did not decay because God raised them up and where I witnesses to that so that seems to me that those would be the two scriptures that are being referred to I think that those are our best clues to see actually how the apostles were using those and although many scholars will not say that you know Paul or Peter or whoever uttered these sermons or speeches on these particular occasions most scholars today according to Craig Keener most scholars today agree that these speeches in the book of Acts it can encapsulate the apostolic curriculum the apostolic preaching of that time so that would seem to suggest that the apostles were preaching using Psalm 16 10 and Psalm 2 7 as the scriptures that were fulfilled by Jesus rising from the dead and you say well wait a minute don't like that because Paul has to repurpose those that's not the original meaning well unfortunately that that is correct but that's what they did and it wasn't just the early Christians that did this the Jews of that time did it and Greco the Greek and Roman authors did it to their own literature they would repurpose and and and and and and conflate you'd have these conflation of texts together that's just how they did things back then yeah I like to give the example of Paul in his writings references Leviticus not to muzzle and ox and and in the new meaning or the secondary meaning that Paul gives it and he gives that phrase phrase fresh life he's asking for people's money a solicitation of funds so yeah he certainly repurposes that Old Testament text so we do see that that's right great thanks Mike for answering that question from Chris on the scriptures and also for guiding us through what the a number of the verses and the passages about from Paul on the the writings of the experience that he had the appearances and other types of appearances or Christ shining in our hearts and I know it's complex and we've got more that we're gonna cover next week as well from the book of Acts and a discussion on what exactly was the importance of that that appearance to Paul so yeah cuz I just want to like sum up what we've talked about here today with these scriptures they really haven't told us much at all about what Paul thought about resurrection that's where we're at at this moment that's going to change so there's there's more to come so be sure to subscribe to Dr. Ocona's YouTube channel so you can get a notification on next week's episode when it lands and if this podcast has been a blessing to you please consider visiting risenjesus.com/donate to start your monthly support today this has been the risen Jesus podcast a ministry of Dr. Mike Lacona

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