

(9) Resurrection Stories

1. Introduction to 1 Corinthians 15

1 Cor. 15: 3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

- 1 Corinthians is (arguably) one of Paul's earlier letters, certainly written by the mid-fifties, and probably earlier.
- Paul's letters are occasional, i.e. written for specific reasons to deal with specific problems in his communities.
- Corinth is a complex community with a variety of problems, one of which is that they are arguing about the resurrection. Some are saying "there is no resurrection of the dead", whatever they might have meant by that, and Paul is here attempting to answer them, and does so by invoking the resurrection traditions.
- Paul's invoking of the earliest resurrection traditions is revealing for several reasons:
 - He reveals what is shared by him and by other early Christians.
 - He reveals what was shared with him at the first.
 - It is what the earliest Christians regarded "as of prime importance".
 - Our earliest account of the resurrection by at least a decade, perhaps more.

2. Appearance to Paul

- Paul makes his own appearance the climax (or afterthought?) of the list. Would others have told the story this way?
- Paul's defensive note: *last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me* (v.8) – shows his consciousness that this was not part of the standard set of appearances, out of time from the others.

- Paul links it closely to be his identity as an apostle – cf. elsewhere:

1 Cor. 9.1-2: “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2. If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you

- And notice here, 1 Cor. 15.9, “*For I am the least of the apostles*”
- The issue of Paul’s resurrection appearance is particularly taxing in connection with the issue of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. Does Paul’s description of his own resurrection experience give credence to those who think that the earliest belief was in a non-physical resurrection?
- The difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that Paul seems to stress, in this chapter, the physicality of the resurrection of all believers, and the similarity of their resurrection to Jesus’, which is the first fruits.
- Can we gain some further understanding of how Paul viewed Jesus’ resurrection by looking at Paul’s reflections later in the chapter? What does he mean by “body” and by “physical” and “spiritual”?

3. Appearances to the apostles

- The grouping appears to work like this:
 - **Cephas**
 - Then the twelve
 - Then five hundred all at once – some now dead, most still alive.
 - **James**
 - Then all the apostles
- Cephas and James were leaders of the early Christian community in Jerusalem – connection between resurrection appearances and apostolic commissioning.
- “The twelve” – useful corroboration from Paul of this key element datum.
 - No consciousness of Judas? No Judas in Mark 16 either. Has “the Twelve” already become stylized?
- Peter and the disciples are mentioned in the Gospel resurrection accounts, but James

is not – he is conspicuous by his absence.

- Why is James so prominent in the early Christian movement? Did a visionary experience change James's attitude?
- Or are the Gospels inclined to play down James's role in Jesus' mission?

4. Absence of the women

- Where are the women? The four Gospels are unanimous that the empty tomb was experienced by women, one of whom was Mary Magdalene – and John makes Mary the first one to experience the resurrected Jesus.
- Did the earliest Christian tradition fail to mention the women's role? If so, how do the Gospel writers know about it?
- Is it that the women are connected with the tomb and Peter and company with resurrection appearances?

5. Is there an empty tomb?

- Paul does not appear to mention an empty tomb, at least not explicitly. But does he imply one in v. 3, *that he was buried*?
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6. Mark 16 – the textual problem

- It is scholarly consensus that Mark originally ended at Mark 16.8, and that the other endings were supplied by later scribes.
- Pre-1950 consensus in scholarship was that the original ending of Mark got lost.
 - This thesis was recently revived by Clayton Croy, *The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel*
- For at least the last generation, it has been consensus that Mark intentionally ended the book at 16.8.

- R. H. Lightfoot demonstrated in 1954 that it was possible for an ancient text to end with “for”. The Greek is *ephobounto gar*, “for they were afraid”.
- Throughout history, people have found the ending at 16.8 unsatisfactory and have attempted to write other endings, including Matthew and Luke.

7. Mark and 1 Corinthians

- One baffling factor in the discussion of the resurrection is the *lack* of commonality between Mark 16 and 1 Cor. 15:
 - One has an empty tomb but no appearances; the other has appearances but no (explicit) empty tomb.
 - Absence of the women from Paul’s account, or “young man”.
 - The only person common to the two is Peter. Is Mark 16 a prequel to the action beginning in 1 Cor. 15.5, “and that he appeared to Cephas”?
- Does Mark write his resurrection story conscious of the tradition represented in 1 Cor. 15 since his account stops before the other account starts?

8. The Empty Tomb

- Mark’s account begins after Jesus has left the tomb but before anyone has witnessed this. 16.4: “the stone . . . had already been rolled back.”
- The women are witnesses to the notion that Jesus’ body is not in the tomb. They are not yet witnesses to the resurrected Jesus.
- 16.5: “they enter the tomb” and the young man has to point to the spot where Jesus had been laid – the account imagines a typical first century Jerusalem tomb.

9. Galilee

- Why does Mark stress Galilee here?
- Matthew 28 and John 21 also mention appearances in Galilee, but are they

dependent on Mark?

- Luke adjusts all the appearances to Jerusalem. Is there some plausibility here in that our earliest source (Paul) places Peter and James in Jerusalem in the 30s and 40s (Gal. 1-2)?
- What is the relationship between “on the third day” in 1 Cor. 15.4 and Mark 16? Is there enough time for Peter and the disciples to return to Galilee?

10. The Women

- Mary Magdalene is common to the resurrection stories across the four Gospels. What do we know about Mary Magdalene outside of these stories?
 - In John she is the chief and first witness.
- The personnel differ, both within Mark and between the Gospels.

Mark 15.40: Mary Magdalene, Mary of James the less and the mother of Ioses and Salome

Mark 15.47: Mary Magdalene and Mary of Ioses.

Mark 16.1: Mary Magdalene and Mary of James and Salome

- Is the underlined name the same person? Who is she?
- Is it that these names are so well known to the first readers that the variation goes unnoticed, or is it that Mark has no idea who they are?
- The forefronting of the women is sometimes seen as part of Mark’s animus against the male disciples (“the twelve”): these true disciples have followed Jesus, and served him from Galilee to Jerusalem and beyond.
- Do these women also fail in Mark’s narrative in the end? A dark and fear-ridden end to an enigmatic Gospel?
- Does the fact of women here say anything about the historicity of the story?

Mark Goodacre, July 2016