

Harmonizing the “early morning” resurrection accounts

A Sunday Morning Adult Bible Study—Rev. Jayson S. Galler

April 08, 2007, at Ebenezer, Manheim, & April 15 at Grace Lutheran Church, Elgin, Texas

- Invocation & Collect for the Word
- On March 31 the Daily Lectionary appoints the reading of Luke 23-24 (see my on-line comments at http://www.graceelgin.org/my-journal/archives/2007_03.asp#000492). That day a reader asked what to make of Luke’s account (Luke 24:9, 22-23) saying the women told the disciples, and Mark’s account (Mark 16:8) saying they were too frightened to talk, and the next day I answered (<http://www.graceelgin.org/resources/lectionary/questions03.asp#Q19>). Perhaps nothing is pointed to with greater frequency as a “seeming contradiction” in the Bible than the resurrection accounts. We thought some additional discussion of this matter would be beneficial. (If you are not familiar with it, the Daily Lectionary and “Bible web log” are at <http://www.graceelgin.org/resources/lectionary/>.)
- Each reports actual occurrences; none is exhaustive; fragmentary; complementary, true and sufficient. “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35), and only one plausible explanation is needed.
- Essentially five accounts of the Resurrection of Our Lord, each with various considerations. Their respective accounts are said to “differ from each other to an astonishing degree” so much that numerous contradictions are alleged and some altogether have given up the idea of “harmonizing” them as an impossible task (usually give up of the resurrection itself). Anglican scholar John Wenham concludes: “these resurrection stories exhibit in a remarkable way the well-known characteristics of accurate and independent reporting, for superficially they show great disharmony, but on close examination the details gradually fall into place.” (John Wenham, *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?* first published by Paternoster, 1992, reprinted by Wipf & Stock, 2005 [cast, great diagrams, genealogical charts, etc.].) Not just five witnesses who can err (TV experience), but Divinely inspired.
 - Matthew (“Levi”): false claims, Clopas’s wife source, recommissioning, where was he?
 - Mark: his own family’s role, Peter, ending at verse 8 or verse 20? (Confer *Small Cat*.)
 - Luke: Joanna as source, Paul’s co-worker, facts, fulfillment of OT, message; Acts
 - John: goal to create faith, trustworthiness, Jesus’s humanity and Sonship
 - Paul (1 Co 15:3-8): historical basis for the Gospel, abbreviated report, his own encounter
- “The most obvious point of difficulty concerns the events of the first Easter morning” (see reverse)
 - Number of women: Luke at least 5, Mark 3, Matthew 2, John 1, Paul 0
=Mary Magdalene; Mary, James’s mother (“other Mary”); Joanna and Salome in John’s “we”
 - Time of the visit: John still dark, Mark sun had risen
=left in dark, time to travel from wherever they came, sunrise when they arrived (or imprecision)
 - Number of messengers: Mark one man, Luke two men, Matthew one angel, Luke two
=Angels’ appearance as men, one spoke the message, other affirmed (singular or plural justified)
 - Location of messengers: Mark, Luke, and John inside; Matthew out then in (sitting/standing)
=Initially outside, moves in, statement “come” is not necessarily an invitation in but to look
 - Telling the disciples: Matthew and Luke yes; Mark no (also translation, maybe “over-awed”)
=Mark just means they didn’t tell anyone “else” or maybe didn’t do so until seeing Jesus
 - Appearance of Christ: John at the tomb, Matthew after tomb visit
=Mary Magdalene tells disciples and sees Jesus back to the tomb; others go in and see angels, go to tell disciples, and see Jesus on the way back (or maybe same appearance); multiple ways to go
 - Holding of Christ by woman(en): Matthew unrebuked, John rebuked
=Mary Magdalene not forbidden to touch but to fear leaving Him for even a moment
- Other questions? Assurances?
- Closing Prayer & Benediction