

QUESTIONS:

So if, as you say, Paul believed in a 'physical resurrection of the body (= of the corpse, right?) of Jesus' then why did he never refer to an empty tomb or to the discovery of such an empty tomb by the apostles in his letters although that would have fitted well at occasions?

Also, and I know we have discussed these matters briefly here before, why did Paul describe the 'risen Christ' as a light etc in his visions? And not as a humanoid? And if that 'transformed' body was so different from the normal, natural body humans have then why assume the corpse was actually needed in the first place to get 'resurrected' in this new one (and if a corpse is needed then what about corpses that have been totally decomposed?)? Why is it Paul's aim to get away from the physical body that he himself is currently living in (as he mentions in some of his letters)?

Why does Paul then contrast the 'natural' body to the 'spiritual' body? Why does he call those people FOOLS who ask: "How are the dead raised? With what KIND OF BODY will they come?" (1 Cor 15) ? Why does he claim that FLESH and BLOOD cannot inherit the kingdom?

RESPONSES:

These are great questions, and get to the heart of the matter. I will deal with them one at a time.

(1) My guess is that Paul does not talk about any traditions that indicated that women went to the tomb and found it empty because he had not heard these tradition. Paul certainly thought, and would have said, if asked, that the tomb was empty, because he definitely thought Jesus was physically raised from the dead. That is his entire argument in 1 Corinthians 15. His Corinthian opponents maintained that the resurrection of believers was a past spiritual event, and they had already experienced it. Paul's purpose in 1 Corinthians is NOT, decidedly not, to argue that Jesus really was raised from the dead physically. That is the view that he accepts as OBVIOUS and AGREED UPON between himself and the Corinthians. I say this because some people have claimed that 1 Corinthians 15 is the chapter where Paul tries to prove Jesus resurrection. That's not true at all. He USES the belief in Jesus' physical resurrection - a belief he shares with his readers - in order to argue a different point, about their OWN resurrection. His point is that since Jesus' resurrection was a bodily resurrection (which the Corinthians agree on), then their own resurrection will as well be bodily. Which means it is not simply spiritual. Which means they have not experienced it yet, whatever they may be saying or thinking. The entire argument, in other words, is predicated on an understanding that Jesus was physically raised from the dead. So why doesn't Paul mention the empty tomb? Probably because he doesn't know of the stories later found in the Gospels about it. Would he have said the tomb was empty? Certainly yes. But that would have been out of logical necessity, not because he had heard stories about Mary Magdalene going there on the third day.

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