

A Body of Divinity

Or

The Walking Dead?

¹⁹ On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." And while they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst.

³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit.

³⁸ And He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

³⁹ "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." (Luk 24:36-39 NAS)

²⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

²¹ Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

²² And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld."

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe."

²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;

³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

John 20:19-31

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What Happens When We Die?

What is the great hope of the Christian? It is the great hope that, when we die, this is not the end. We are not like others who, when a loved one dies, grieve with “no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). Rather, we have “the hope laid up ... in heaven” (Col 1:5). It is “the hope of glory” (Col 1:27), “the hope of righteousness” (Gal 5:5), “the hope of salvation” (1 Thess 5:8), the “hope of eternal life” (Titus 1:2), “an

inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for [us]” (1 Pet 1:3).

There are, of course, those in the world who hope for such things too, but upon what do they base their hope? They base it upon the fact that they know that there is life after death for all human beings. We will talk about this shortly. But other than this, what basis makes this *kind* of hope certain? I mean, why would they think that they will just automatically go to heaven; why not hell? Is it based on some kind of arbitrary scale of weights and measures? “He was a good man in this life, he will be in heaven.” Is it just based on wishful thinking? Why should God let anyone into heaven?

The Christian hope is not some kind of wishful thinking, nor does it have to do with our own righteousness (that is why we hope for righteousness). Rather, it is “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:4). Thus, it is the “hope set on the *living* God” (1 Tim 4:10), because Jesus is *alive* and Jesus is *God*. But “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19).

You see, our hope is built on nothing less than—not only on Jesus’ blood and righteousness, but on his

resurrection from the dead. Indeed, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14). “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17). Absolutely everything about our hope hinges upon this unique historic event.

But how is it unique? It is *not* that other people have not been raised from the dead. It is unique in other ways than this. I’ll give two things. It is unique in that Jesus raised himself from the dead. He promised back in John 2:19, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Others have been raised from the dead. Some have been brought back after a couple of minutes. Others have been brought back after a little longer than this, perhaps dozens of minutes, maybe even into hours, depending on the circumstances. In the Scripture, you even have people who have been dead for days coming back to life. But one thing they all have in common is that they were all brought back from the dead *by someone else*. This was true of Jesus as well, who was raised to life by the Father and the Spirit, yet it is unique in that he also brought *himself* back from the dead. For he is God and God raised him from the dead. He raised himself up.

This is not the focus of our passage today, however. Rather, it is a second thing I'll focus on that makes Jesus' resurrection unique. This is **the nature of his life after death**. By "nature" I'm talking about **the kind of coming back from the dead that his was**. I'm talking about **the kind of body that he now had/has**. In order to help us see this, however, I'm going to place Jesus' resurrection against the backdrop of some fairly strange things from the ancient world.

A moment ago I said that people in Jesus' day—just like people in our own—**know that there is life after death**. Their hope is one thing. But it is another thing entirely to base this hope upon what they actually know. As we will see, the two things do not comport. What they know is not what we are talking about with Jesus' resurrection, because Jesus' resurrection is unique. What we know because of Christ's resurrection and what we therefore hope for is a very different thing from what the world knows about life after death and what their hope should thus be based upon. Ours *is* hope, while other kinds of life after death are definitely not something to be hoped for, some just the opposite.

Life After Death

Jesus vs. Lazarus

Let's start with a very familiar life-after-death experience, since it is found in our Gospel. This is the [experience of Lazarus](#). Lazarus came back from the dead. He was dead for four days inside of his own tomb, having had his body already begin to decay. Yet, when he came out, he was whole and fit and intact. It must have been a wonder to everyone, not merely that he was alive, but that he was perfectly preserved. Yet, Lazarus' body was still his old body. It could eat and do other physical things. But it had not been transformed to do extraordinary things. It could not walk through walls. It could not appear and disappear at will. Most importantly, [Lazarus died again](#). In fact, if Lazarus is the original author of many of the stories in this Gospel, this perhaps accounts for why a story grew up about that he would not die ([John 21:23](#)). The very end of our gospel says that in fact the beloved disciple would die (again).

Jesus' resurrection is different. The Gospel of John tells us some pretty extraordinary things about it. First, we learn that [he can pass through solid objects](#). This happens not once, but twice. [John 20:19](#) says that the disciples were sitting in a closed room with the doors all locked from the inside. Suddenly, ["Jesus came and stood among them."](#)

How did he get in there if the doors were locked? It says nothing about him picking or busting the locks or breaking doors down.

Luke's Gospel adds more information. While some of the disciples were telling the others about what they had seen that morning, "He Himself stood in their midst" (Luke 24:36). This is the same locked room. What he adds is that "they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit" (vs. 37). They thought he was a ghost. We will deal with this idea in a moment. For now, all we need to see is that Jesus entered a closed room and frightened them. Lazarus could never have done this.

I said this happens twice. So we read, "Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them" (John 20:26). So he enters two locked rooms, rooms full of people, and we are left concluding that his body was able to pass through solid objects to do it.

Along the same lines, is Jesus' sudden appearance. In fact, this might be a second idea or another way of explaining the first, but the sudden appearance is itself extraordinary. In our modern scientific world, we might explain the sudden appearance as moving from one

dimension to another, like you might see in an episode of **Star Trek**. But this is not science fiction. It really happened. Jesus' resurrected body was able to appear and disappear at will. My guess is that Lazarus was in as much shock and awe as anyone else in that room, if indeed he was in it. This is because Jesus' body is not like Lazarus' body. His resurrection is quite different.

How else might people know that there is life after death? We are going to move now into some things that will be familiar to you and others that will seem like true science fiction or even horror. Before doing so, I want to say a few caveats. First, I came across this discussion in a scholarly journal article which attempts to demonstrate the unique aspects of Jesus' resurrection as compared to the following ancient ideas, ideas which form stories, stories which are also life-after-death experiences. So, I'm following the ideas presented in that paper.¹

¹ Deborah Thompson Prince, "The 'Ghost' of Jesus: Luke 24 in Light of Ancient Narratives of Post-Mortem Apparitions," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29.3 (2007): 287-301. <http://www.michaelsheiser.com/TheNakedBible/GhostLuke24.pdf> (now offline). So see

<file:///Users/douglasvandorn/Downloads/Journal%20for%20the%20Study%20of%20the%20New%20Testament%20vol.%2029%20no.%203%20Prince%20D.%20T%20-%20The%20Ghost%20of%20Jesus%20Luke%2024%20in%20Light%20of%20Ancient%20Narratives%20of%20Post-Mortem%20Apparitions%202007%2010.1177.0143984X070761091%20-%2008en1.pdf> Another one I have not yet read is Shannon Dugger, "Deification or Demonization: Jesus' Post-Resurrection Body in Luke 24:36-40," *University of Tennessee* (N.D.), https://religion.utk.edu/students/pdf/6_Dugger.pdf.

Second, please **do not be put off** by the things that follow. I'm not doing this to get a rise out of anyone. Rather, try to do what good Bible interpreters are supposed to do: enter into the world of the original audience. Try to think as they might have thought. Try to get into their heads, by understanding the background information that they would have been familiar with. The following stories will help us do that, especially knowing that they were in fact thinking strange things the very moment they first saw Jesus, as Luke himself tells us.

Third, a major reason I'm doing this is because **I think it can be helpful** to you. Whether you believe all of these things are possible or none of them (if you believe none of them, then you deny some of the Scripture), the point is not really about the reality of such things, but how Jesus' resurrection is unlike anything else talked or written about in regard to life after death. We often wonder what our own resurrections will be like. What kind of bodies will we have? How does our hope differ from the false-hope of others. I *hope* that when we are finished, you will come away from this seeing the true gloom and doom of the unbelieving hope, while simultaneously seeing the glory and greatness of

our own hope as Christians. This hope exists because of the nature of Christ's resurrection.

Jesus vs. Translated Mortals

Basically, there are **four kinds of life-after-death appearances** known in the ancient world. This includes the whole world, really; as these ideas have existed from beyond the first human records and continue to fascinate and sometimes scare people even in the modern world of today. We will move from the most believable to the least believable. I put it this way not because I have personally witnessed any of what follows (and so those are somehow believable to me), or because I somehow just made up in my mind what I think is believable, but the Scriptures do speak about some of it, and what it speaks about is certain and believable to me.

We will start with **translated mortals**. Translated mortals have **a kind of life-after-death**, though it is kind of strange to talk about it that way. You are familiar with the idea of what it means to be "**translated**." It isn't talking about someone who spoke English and now speaks Spanish. This means you **go to heaven without dying**. There are two such persons in the Bible that were translated: Enoch and

Elijah. Dispensationalists speculate that these two will return prior to the coming of Christ. Jews in the days of Jesus believed that perhaps John the Baptist was Elijah returned from heaven (this was mistaken, of course, since John the Baptist was born from Elizabeth and Zechariah; he did not return as an adult). Peter, James, and John all saw Elijah (along with Moses) when Jesus was transfigured. So, Elijah has a kind of life-after-death return to our earth. Though he never died, he did interact with people in our realm of existence, and this is certainly similar to what happened to Jesus.

In these stories (you find them in Greek literature and other places), it is really unclear what the exact nature of these translated bodies is. Some things are clear. It is clear that they can be **recognized**. There is consistency between the earthly body and the translated body. We certainly see this parallel Jesus' resurrection, though with Jesus we also see that they often did not recognize him. There is also a great consistency in these stories with what happens to Jesus forty days later, when he ascends into heaven. To be translated is to ascend into heaven like Elijah on a chariot of fire. In fact, of all the kinds of life-after-death stories that we have, this one alone is consistent with Jesus' ascension.

Yet, who has the hope of being translated? I mean, if it has only happened a handful of times in history, what kind of presumption would it be to think this will happen to you? I won't get into the whole Rapture theory today. But more than this, the story of Jesus is **unlike** translated mortal stories in a most basic way: Jesus died and was buried. That never happened to Enoch or Elijah. Translated people don't die. Thus, no skeptic can say that Jesus is simply a translated mortal, that there is nothing more to it than that. There are overlaps, but there are also things that are not the same at all. The resurrection is a different kind of thing.

Jesus vs. Ghosts

A second kind of story is the familiar **ghost story**. Just here we are moving away from anything that could be considered comfortable to talk about in public, especially in church. Most people have no problem talking about translated people, because of the popularity of the Rapture theory. But ghosts? This is not for polite conversation. Yet, ghosts are in the Bible and we need not be afraid of such things, if we will learn to think rightly and biblically about them. This is especially important to do regarding Jesus'

resurrection. For this one is actually something we know that people thought he was.

The idea of ghosts comes up in the story of the resurrection of Jesus. As we have seen in **Luke 24:37**, the disciples thought that when Jesus appeared to them that he was a spirit. Several translations render this “spirit” (*pneuma*) as “ghost” (CJB, NET, NRS, CEB, NIV, NLT). They thought he was a ghost, but **they were mistaken**. This is not the only time our disciples were confused in such a way. When Jesus walked on water they said, “**It is a ghost** (*phantasma*)” (**Matt 14:26; Mark 6:49**).²

The OT mentions different beings that can all be categorized as ghosts.³ Usually, ghosts were thought to be the spirit/souls of dead human beings. In ancient times all the way down to today, this has been the normal use of the term.⁴ Ghosts are *not* demons, *not* angels, but the hauntings

² An interesting study on this passage is Jason Robert Combs, “A Ghost on the Water? Understanding an Absurdity in Mark 6:49-50,” *JBL* 127, no. 2 (2008): 345-358. <http://www.michaelsheiser.com/TheNakedBible/MarkGhost.pdf>

³ Heiser lists *ittim* as the closest idea, but also *metim* (spirit of the dead), an ob (a spirit that could be contacted by a medium, or a possessed medium), and *yiddeoni* (a spirit that has knowledge humans do not). *Rephaim* are probably a bit farther away, since they seem to refer to the dead nephilm which were thought to be demonic (*shedim*) rather than ghosts. Even *elohim* seems to be a word that can mean a ghost, since Samuel the *elohim* comes back to tell Saul about his future. See his series “Discerning the Dead,” <http://michaelsheiser.com/TheNakedBible/category/realms-of-the-dead/page/2/>

⁴ Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (Symposium Series 12; New York/Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1984), 41

of dead human beings. Now do you see why they were so frightened? What if Jesus was now haunting *them*!

Now, you may be tempted to say that there is no such thing as a ghost, that they are purely imaginative, but that is not biblical. Rather, what is biblical is to say that we are **not to try to contact them**. There are laws against contacting ghosts, first of all because it is possible, second because it is strictly forbidden to cross between realms like that for reasons that God knows, and third of all, frankly, because they are not a very good source of information, not the least reason being that they are fallen and sinful people. I'm sure you can think of other reasons as well.

There are some **similarities** that Jesus has with ghosts. First, unlike translated mortals, ghosts have died. Jesus likewise died. Ghosts also disappear and appear. Jesus did that. Ghosts can also appear to the eye in a recognizable form. Think about how Saul recognized Samuel! This is also true of Jesus, but here is where the similarities stop.

Curiously, the fact that Jesus contacted the disciples and gave them information are two of the reasons that we know Jesus was not a ghost. This contact is not viewed as evil or forbidden. He is not haunting them, but bringing them peace. Also, he gave them all kinds of information, true

information, important information, and nothing is ever presented as bad about what he did. Furthermore, ghosts **remain in their tombs**; their bones never leave. Jesus' bones were nowhere to be found; except under his new skin, the skin that he showed to the disciples and to Thomas. That brings up the most important difference. Ghosts are not tactile, physical, or palpable. They can be recognized, but **not touched** in Greek and other literature. Indeed, it is because the disciples were frightened of this very idea we are looking at right now that most people will say Jesus let them touch him. For he was not a ghost. The resurrection is both like and unlike the ghostly phenomena. Because it is different, this will have a major application later on in the sermon.

Jesus vs. Heroes

The next phenomena are sometimes called **hero stories**. The Greeks told many hero stories. In the one's I'm talking about here, the hero has died. Like ghosts, his bones remain in the tomb. But the hero comes back from the dead, sometimes to deliver a message, like an angel; sometimes to fight in battle, also like angels. Hollywood loves to tell hero stories, such as Clint Eastwood's *High Plains Drifter*. Unlike

ghosts, these heroes can be embraced, leave footprints, eat and drink. This makes them worth mentioning, since it is such a physical phenomena and since Jesus after his resurrection does all of these same things.

There are two **disconnects** between the hero story and Jesus' resurrection. First, Jesus' body did not remain in the grave, and second, his new body ascended into heaven. Returning heroes, rather than ascend to heaven simply vanish like ghosts. I'm not aware of any exact parallels in the Scripture to the hero stories. But clearly, Jesus is not a hero returning in such a way. His resurrection is different yet again.

But who among us is a hero anyway? Like the translate mortal, who would dare presume that they will be like a returning hero? The heroes always return to the dead, so there isn't much hope in that. So you get to come back and fight for few hours. What about the rest of eternity? You are starting to get a feel for the actual "hope" that unbelievers should have about their own life-after-death, if the history of the human race and its known stories have anything to say about it. But there is one last story we will now look at, and it is truly frightening; it is anything but hopeful.

Jesus vs. Revenants

The last one to look at is probably the strangest of all. I'm going to mention it, not because I'm making a comment on the validity of such a thing, but because I'm going to make a preaching point in a moment on it as an illustration of what kind of hope the unbeliever really has concerning life after death. It is called the [revenant](#).

Most people have never heard the term revenant, though I saw that there was a Hollywood B-Movie horror flick by this title back in 2009. The best example of a revenant in ancient Greece is the young girl **Philinnion** in Phlegon's *Book of Marvels* 1. The story is kind of creepy,

At some point after her death and burial the young girl Philinnion emerges at night from her family tomb to rendezvous with a male guest in her father's house. The man has no idea who she is. Before dawn she slips away and returns again to her tomb. This continues for three nights until her parents discover her, at which time she returns to death, her body visibly stretched across the guest bed. Upon inspection by the entire town, her coffin is found empty, but for some tokens given to her by the guest during their prior

encounters. During this period of reanimation, she eats and drinks and has [relations] with the man.⁵

Basically, the revenant is an **undead person**. It returns from the grave to right some kind of wrong, or gain revenge for its death only to return to its grave again. It is kind of like a hero story except that the corpse actually becomes reanimated! You might think this sounds like a today's zombie. But zombies don't really have brains or carry out revenge; they really aren't self-aware. A more common popular revenant would be a **mummy** or perhaps even a **vampire** (like Lilith, who is mentioned in **Isa 34:14**).

Curiously, in a commentary on **Revelation 20:8**, James Moffat writes that “**The Beast is a sort of revenant. To rise from the abyss was the conventional origin of the Beast even in the primitive tradition; the Nero-antichrist ... introduces the fresh horror of a monster breaking loose even from death.**”⁶ More than perhaps any other, this association of a revenant with the Beast and Antichrist is going to make for **an interesting application in a moment**.

First, I want to look at the **similarities and differences between a revenant and Christ's resurrection**. Like Jesus,

⁵ Prince, 292.

⁶ James Moffat, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Volume V: Commentary* (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), 452–453.

these persons also died. Perhaps most important, like Jesus, the revenant's body leaves its tomb! This is the creepy part. It becomes palpable, open for visual and physical inspection. It can eat. So, in some ways, Jesus' body has more similarities with this creature than any other, and that alone makes it important to talk about.

But it has vital differences. Revenants do not disappear or enter places unseen, nor are they taken up into heaven; they go back to their graves. Even more, Jesus is not out for revenge against his disciples who have just forsaken him. Rather, he comes in peace. Again, I'm not saying there are or aren't revenants. I have no idea. I've certainly never seen one. But that isn't the point at all. The point is one of comparison with things those in Jesus' day would have been able to relate to, even as they also can in our own. If he isn't a ghost, someone may think he is a translated mortal. If not that, then perhaps a returning hero. If not that, maybe he is a revenant. All of these would have been in the minds of ancient people, and comparing the similarities and differences helps us get a handle on Jesus' life after death ... *and our own.*

Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15

What this survey demonstrates is that Jesus' resurrection **does have overlaps** with other sorts of life-after-death experiences. These experiences demonstrate that we continue to have a kind of body, even after death. Don't ask me the metaphysics of that body; I don't know. But it only makes sense.

All creatures God has made have bodies. Spiritual bodies are still bodies. The Apostle says, **"There is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory"** (1 Cor 15:39-41). Let me comment on this just briefly.

All living, physical flesh differs: humans from animals from birds from fish. Each has its own body and each its own glory. When we die, we have another kind of body, at least for a while. This is what these ghosts and translations and other stories teach us. When we die, we do not cease to exist. We go somewhere. And by "we" I mean all human beings, **be they saved or not**. To be somewhere, you have to have a presence; you have to be in a location; you have to

have some kind of a body. The bodies we have when we die differ from the bodies we have today.

The Apostle thus speaks of the sun, moon, and stars, and in doing this, he is using the ancient mindset of heavenly beings; stars were viewed as angelic in some kind of mysterious way. All he is saying is that angels have different kinds of bodies than we humans do. He is confirming that spiritual existence is still existence. Even angels have bodies. All of this is to say that indeed, when we die we do carry on with some kind of body. **But understand, just to exist, just to have some kind of body in the afterlife is NOT the Christian's hope.** It is a pagan hope, and with this I want to conclude this morning.

In every instance, Jesus' resurrected body is **more than** any one of these other bodies. This is because Jesus is not a revenant, not a zombie, not a vampire, not a creature of the night. He is not a ghost, not a demon, not a hero, not a translated moral. Jesus is God and his resurrection is the first-fruit of a great resurrection to come. It was the first of its kind, unique.

This resurrection is explained with some pretty remarkable language in the same 1 Corinthians 15 passage where Paul talks about different kinds of bodies. Here is

what we learn about it specifically. It is “imperishable” (1 Cor 15:42). It will never die or cease to exist. The intermediate state of a Christian seems to only be temporary. Our resurrected body is permanent.

It is raised “in glory” (vs. 43). This is opposed to being sown in dishonor. The idea here seems to be related to sin and evil. The bodies we are in now are part and parcel of this present evil age. They were conceived in sin and in corruption. But our new bodies will not be like this. They will be formed directly by God, rather than by our parents, in glorious sinless perfection.

The body we have now is weak. This also seems to be related to sin. We easily give into sinful temptations, though Christ, in a body just like ours, withstood the temptation. But our new bodies will be raised in power (43). Perhaps this power has even more in mind than morality, but it must have in mind at least that much.

Finally, it is raised as a spiritual body (44). The bodies we are in now are natural bodies. A spiritual body is capable of doing things like we see Jesus do in our text. As we have seen, Jesus walks through walls. Jesus appears in rooms. The spiritual world is not like the physical world, and yet it is not completely unlike it either.

If we look at the story of Thomas more carefully, we will see that there is a continuity between future resurrected bodies and present bodies. In this, there is similarity between several of the other kinds of bodies we have looked at already. Because when you die, you do not cease being you, as Samuel demonstrates when Saul calls him up from the dead and he is able to recognize him.

I had a philosophy professor who was adamant that the new resurrected body will have **no continuity** whatsoever with our present bodies. This seems to fly in the face of our story today. “Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe. Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe’” (John 20:24-27). Did Jesus just add these after

the fact? That would be deceptive. No, these were the very scars he was given at the cross while in the flesh as we are.

Now, given what we now know about other forms of life-after-death, being able to **touch** someone isn't absolute proof of the resurrection. Being able to **recognize** someone isn't either. But putting all of the traits together, this begins to teach us that Jesus is not like anything else that exists on the other side. He is not summoned, he comes of his own accord. He does not haunt, he brings peace (we looked at this last week, and he extends it to Thomas in our passage). He walks through walls and appears like an apparition, but he can be touched unlike them. He can be touched like a revenant, but he walks through walls and appears unlike them. He ascends into heaven. Nothing else does all of these things except Christ's resurrected body. This helps us see that when put together, it does prove that Jesus rose from the dead rather than something else.

But did you catch **something else** in the passage about Jesus? This roots his resurrection in something profound and vital. Thomas did not tell Jesus that he had to touch him. He told the disciples. We get no inkling that they went and told Jesus that he needed this confirmation. In fact, we don't get any inkling that they saw Jesus again until this

second appearance to them in a locked room. Yet, Jesus knows what Thomas needs. Jesus knows, because throughout this Gospel Jesus knows all sorts of things that no one else could possibly know. Jesus is God.

Together with the touching and the supernatural knowledge and the walking through walls, and all the rest, Thomas is driven by the Holy Spirit to confess Christ, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Jesus then asks, “Have you believed because you have seen me?” He puts the question to Thomas.

Why have you believed, Thomas? What was it, really? Was it my hands, my side? Was it my supernatural appearance in this locked room? Was it my omniscience of your need? Was it my prophecies about my death and resurrection that you now see were true? Was it all of them?

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (29). It is not Thomas who is held up as one you are to emulate. Nor is it the disciples, who also had to see Jesus in order to believe. Nor is it even Mary earlier on, who also had to see him to believe. Rather, it is the beloved disciple who believed when all he saw was the empty tomb and linen wraps folded up in the corner. Yet, it is all written so that

you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (31).

And what kind of life? Immortal, glorious, powerful, spiritual life. Life that never ends. Life that continues on in a resurrection body that is made certain because Jesus has been raised from the dead. And if the Head is raised, the body is sure to come. Jesus' resurrection will be followed by more like it. This is our hope.

But what of those who do not trust in Christ? Not everyone is guaranteed a resurrected body like Christ's. The Scripture is clear that all will be raised, *in some form or another*. The Apostle says, "There will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15). Jesus says more in John 5:28-29, "Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment." Revelation says more still, "And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found

written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:13-15). Just as Daniel had said, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan 12:2).

But is the unbeliever’s resurrected body glorious like ours? It is righteous? Not at all. What hope, then, do unbelievers have? None, not really. But to make that more concrete, might I put it this way? Think of the hellish existence of two of the postmortem returns we have looked at this morning. Think on these as what you can hope for if you are not “in Christ.” I’m not taking anything away here from the fiery, dark torments of hell. But I’m adding to it with a kind of picture of the body that goes in it.

The hope the world has, and its only logical hope given what it knows about these things and does not know about Christ, is to have a ghostly, shadowy existence, an existence that only lives to haunt and roam endlessly with purposelessness and inner torment forever. Think of Bob Cratchit and you get the idea of the kind of hope awaiting unbelievers. He is the friend who haunts Ebenezer Scrooge, trying to convince him to become a better man so that he won’t end up like him.

Dicken's story may get the ghost part right, that is what ghost stories are supposed to teach us! But it misses at the vital point. For we do not escape this future by being "nice people" or by not being scrooges. We escape it only through faith in the one who conquered death and no longer lives in it.

Or consider the revenant. Imagine eternity living like a revenant, continuing on forever only desiring to take revenge in a form like a zombie or a mummy or a vampire; an eternally undead existence that is always full of rage and hate and retribution and grief and pain and the inability to forgive and so on.

Incredibly, in the backwards world that is "today," people—especially young people—actually want to be like this. Hollywood often glamorizes it. This is wrong and terribly harmful, for it does not cause people to fear what they ought to fear; it does not teach them to find a solution to this intolerable, insufferable endless horror. Hollywood is at its best when it makes these creatures something you would never want to become. Would that people would remember how they thought of such things as children: terrified, frightened, disgusted, horrified, haunted, and struck with the thought that I would never want to be like

that and I would never want to be around that, especially for eternity. For that is what hell is like, my friend. It is worse than any horror movie Hollywood could dream up. This is the actual hope of a fallen world in the afterlife. It is their only hope. Woe to those who long for such a hope, for surely they will receive it as their reward.

But it does not have to end like that. For Daniel also says, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:2-3). Wisdom is found in Christ. Wisdom is turning to Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. Blessed Jesus rose from the dead and so makes this hope certain. He proved it to the disciples. He proved it to Thomas. If you will confess Christ as Lord and God, take him to be your own, and receive eternal life offered to you now through the Holy Spirit who attends the word, then this end need not be yours.

Of course, we will all die. Ours is still a future hope that awaits us on the other side of the grave. What then shall you do in the meantime? Prepare yourselves today for an eternity that will be the exact opposite of the hope the world has. Tell of the hope of the resurrection and how it differs so greatly, so happily, from the hope of the world. Do not

dwell in the darkness, but do look upon it, see it for what it is, realize those you see around you are in it now, and know that Christ has conquered it. When the disciples saw Jesus “they were glad.” And why not? The true hope of heaven, of glory, of righteousness, of salvation, of eternal life, with an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, and kept in heaven for us in Christ Jesus, the only hope of glory. Blessed be he who has conquered death. Let us all be found in him.

	Luke 23:46, 55	Luke 24:3, 6, (12), 23-24	Luke 24:31	Luke 24:36; John 20	Luke 24:39a	Luke 24:39b	Luke 24:42-43	Luke 24:51
	Dead in known tomb	Empty Tomb	Jesus disappears	Jesus enters a room unseen	Visual inspection of hands, feet ?????	Tactile inspection of “flesh and bone”	Eats in disciple’s presence	Body taken into heaven
Disembodied spirits	yes						not inconsistent	
Revenants								
Heroes								
Translated Mortals	no							

Disembodied Spirits	Revenants	Heroes	Translated mortals
Homer, <i>Iliad</i> 23.103-104; <i>Odyssey</i> 11.204-23 Vergil, <i>Aeneid</i> 2.768-95 Phlegon, <i>Book of Marvels</i> 2	Phlegon, <i>Book of Marvels</i> 1; 3.4-5 Heliodorus, <i>An Ethiopian Tale</i> 6.14-15	Herodotus 6.69, 8.38-39, 64 Pausanias, <i>Descriptions of Greece</i> 6.6.7-11 Plutarch, <i>Life of Theseus</i> 35.5 Philostratus, <i>Heroikos</i>	Herodotus 4.14 Cicero, <i>Republic</i> 2.17-20 Livy, <i>History of Rome</i> 1.16 Dionysius of Halicarnassus, <i>Roman Antiquities</i> 2.56.1-5, 2.63.3-4; 7.72.13 Ovid, <i>Metamorphoses</i> 14.805-28; <i>Fasti</i> 2.503; Plutarch, <i>Life of Romulus</i> 27.3-28.3; 28.4-5 Lucian, <i>Hermetimus</i> 7
Appear as they did in life	reanimated corpse	graves are known and revered	most often without death
Cannot be touched	appear as they did in life	physical contact is possible	or death is disputed
Able to disappear	fully palpable	may change appearance	appear as they did in life
	revival is short-term		palpable
	[Return to mortal life—many are apparent deaths; Alcestis is exception Euripides, <i>Alcestis</i> Plato, <i>Republic</i> 10.614b; <i>Symposium</i> 179b Apollodorus, <i>Library</i> 1.9.15]		or body is cast off and soul alone ascends

Put into chart for by me from Deborah Thompson Prince, “The ‘Ghost’ of Jesus: Luke 24 in Light of Ancient Narratives of Post-Mortem Apparitions,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29.3 (2007): 287-301.