

Just Curious...about Christian Faith

3. Jesus – dead or alive?

In week 1 we looked at the character of God and saw that God is :

A God of LOVE ; A HOLY God ; A JUST God

In week 2 we looked at the person of Jesus and asked the question :

Was he Mad, Bad or God – He claimed to be God & this is what Christians believe.

The notes from sessions 1 & 2 are available from Tim Coad or at www.mscch.org.uk

This week we are going to concentrate on the resurrection of Jesus.

- The Bible claims Jesus rose from the dead.
- Evangelical Christians believe this was real & bodily.
- Christian faith is rooted in a living Jesus!

HISTORY

So, what's the story? It's told in **Luke 22 v 66 – 23 v 56**.

N.B. The four gospels have slightly different accounts as they are told from different perspectives and by different witnesses.

➤ **It begins with a trial.**

Continuously upsetting the Pharisees and religious leaders in many ways, hatred against Jesus grew as fast as his popularity with the 'common people'.

The Pharisees were afraid to arrest Jesus publicly for fear of an uprising among the people who flocked to him for healing and to experience the authority of his words.

He was eventually arrested after the betrayal by one of his own disciples, Judas Iscariot.

The trial of Jesus broke many rules of the day including being held at night, using false witnesses and appalling physical treatment including beating before guilt was confirmed.

There were arguments over jurisdiction as the Jewish leaders sought the death penalty!

- Jesus appeared in front of the chief priests & leaders. (Luke 22 v 66 – 71)
- Jesus was sent to Roman governor, Pilate but he sent him on to Herod. (Luke 23 v 1 – 12)
- Jesus came back to Pilate who found no fault with him but, out of fear, washed his hands of the case and sent Jesus back to the Jews. (Luke 23 v 13 – 25 ; John 18 v 28 – 19 v 16 ; Matthew 27 v 11 - 26)

➤ **It continues with an execution**

Crucifixion was one of the most appalling forms of death, kept for murders, insurrectionists and rebels. Jesus was none of these but was a threat to the religious leaders' authority. So they pushed for the death penalty and got it.

Jesus dies before either of the other two criminals crucified either side of him.. The soldiers break the legs of the other criminals to speed death (Criminals could remain hanging on the Sabbath). They do not need to break Jesus legs as he is already clearly dead. This is confirmed by a soldier who pierces Jesus side with a sword and blood and water flows (John 19 v 31 – 36). As Jesus dies darkness comes over the whole area for three hours and, in the temple, the seamless curtain in the holiest place in the temple tears dramatically from top to bottom! As Jesus dies a watching centurion declares his belief in Jesus.

➤ **It continues with an empty tomb (borrowed from a supporter)**

Jesus body is buried. **Matthew 27 v 57 – 66** tells how a huge stone is rolled over the tomb entrance, a guard is placed by the Roman authorities and the stone is sealed.

Later (**Matthew 28 ; Luke 24**) various woman come to the tomb to anoint the body.....

Amazingly, instead of a sealed tomb, they find an empty one! [Complete with folded grave clothes!] There is an earthquake, the stone moves, the soldiers fall down and angels appear.

Later the authorities bribe the soldiers to spread the story that the disciples stole the body while they were sleeping!

EVIDENCE

So, why do Christians believe Jesus rose from the dead?

Is there another explanation? Can we rely on accounts from Biblical writers?

Note some of the evidence from the Biblical accounts:

- The soldiers were paid to lie – the authorities had no explanation for the missing body
- The women and the disciples did not expect Jesus to rise, although he had said he would. They had not understood! Their surprise at finding the empty tomb is clear!
- If the body had been taken why has it never been produced? If the authorities had moved it they would only have to produce it to quash rumours of resurrection. If the disciples had taken it surely someone, at some time would have cracked.
- The timid and scared disciples were transformed by the message of resurrection. They founded the church and many gave their lives for the message. Would you give your life for what you knew to be a lie?
- Mary's life was changed after she met the risen Jesus!
- Thomas was convinced and abandoned his doubts!
- Peter was a scared man who returned to fishing until the risen Jesus met him. Then he went on to be a fearless apologist for the Christian message!
- The four Gospels were written by eye-witnesses or those in personal contact with those involved.
- The four Gospels mostly written within 30 years of the events they speak of. (John, a little later)
- The church today exists based on the message : Jesus is Alive!
- The church continues to grow worldwide – could this all be based on a lie OR....
- ...is the church a testimony to the living Jesus!

MEANING

Christians believe Jesus rose from the dead. Christian believe Jesus is alive now....in the lives of believers.

Paul writes in a letter **1 Corinthians 15 v 1 – 33**

Paul here says that Jesus being alive is important because :

- Adam's sin (disobedience) brought death into the world
- Jesus death **AND** subsequent resurrection brought life back because...
- ...Jesus (as Pilate said) was innocent of crime and of sin
- So, Jesus death was for my sin.
- Jesus life shows he has gone into death and conquered it, by returning alive....
- *N.B. Others, like Lazarus, were also raised from the dead. However, eventually they died (again!). There have been people since whom God has raised from the dead, physically. They have all died "again"! Jesus has not. He remains alive. His body did not decay. His bones have not been found!*
- The Bible's teaching is that if we believe in Jesus Christ, accept his death was for me and believe he is risen, we will be "saved" (or, will have "eternal life")

Romans 10 v 9

"If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"

John 3 v 16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”