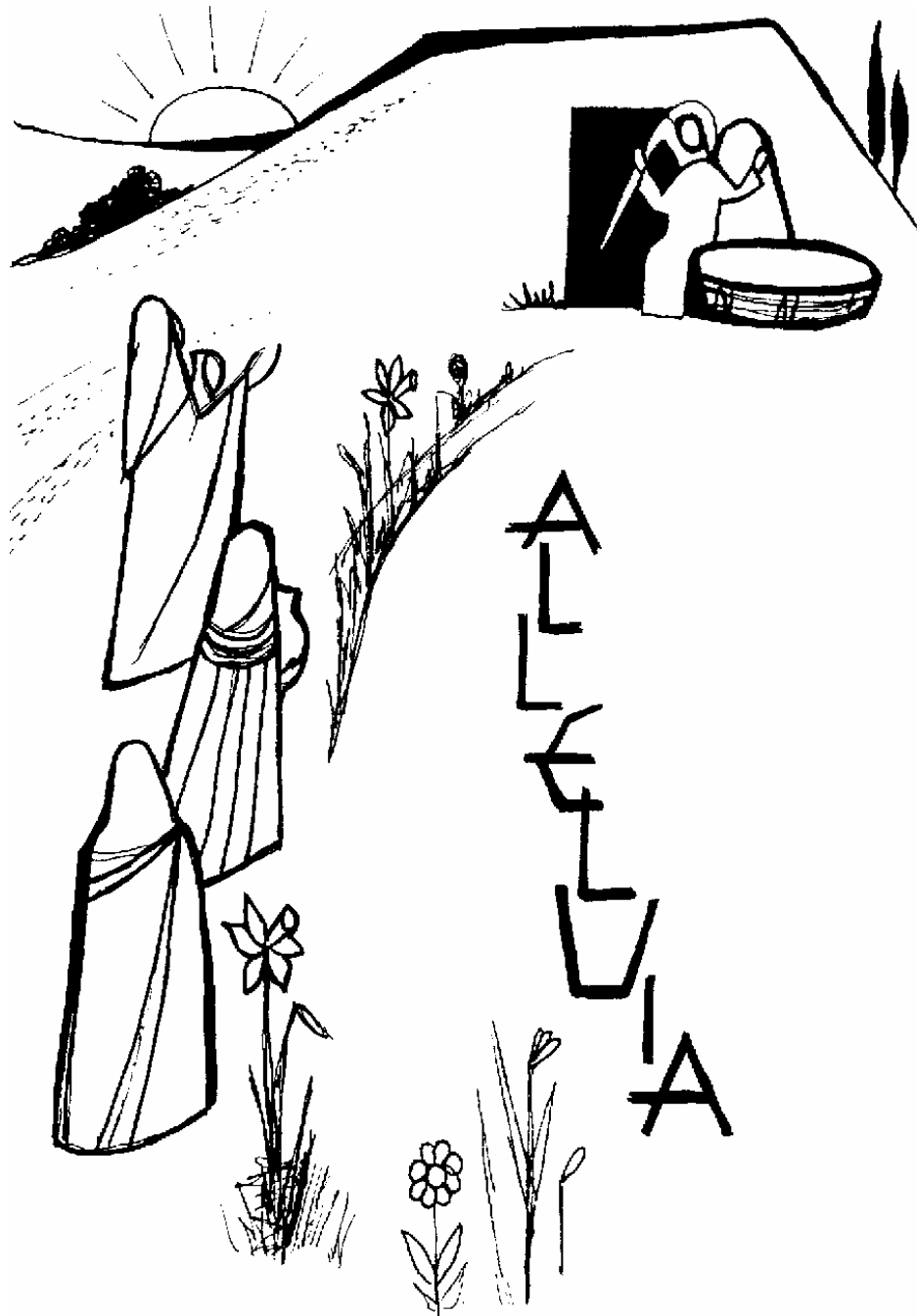


THE EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION



I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord,
who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified,
died and was buried; He descended to the dead.

On the third day He rose again...

RESURRECTION

Christianity stands or falls by the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are no half measures, no nice and safe compromises.

Without the resurrection, Jesus remains simply a man and His life's work and ministry simply a shining example to the world. With the resurrection, He is revealed as God made flesh and His life's work is seen as nothing less than the gift of eternal life to all who believe. That's quite a difference!

So it always surprises me when people who profess a religious, even a Christian faith, seem happier to settle with an inspiring dead man than the One whom John saw in his Revelation, proclaiming, "I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!"

And as we'll see, what is remarkable is that this story of Jesus being raised from the dead came out of a group of disciples who most firmly believed that Jesus was dead and buried. In fact some of them had actually seen Him die. So it was against all their experience and expectations, that to their utter amazement they became witnesses to the greatest event in human history.

Their faith didn't create the resurrection, it was the resurrection that created their faith and by so doing created the Christian Church.

And just in case we think that it was only one or two of the disciples, or just a few emotional and distraught women, the actual number of people who saw Jesus following that first Easter day was around 500 (1 Cor.15v6). We believe the solitary testimony of the reporter on the T.V. or radio, or the lone writer in our newspaper or on our P.C. but apparently for some people, 500 eye witnesses aren't eye witnesses enough.

A belief that does not embrace the resurrection of Jesus from the dead cannot be considered authentic Christianity.

If you are really struggling with this key Christian truth then do talk to a Christian who can help you.

But do know that it matters. St. Paul said that to claim that Jesus was raised from the dead if He hadn't been, was to tell "a string of barefaced lies about God" (1 Cor.15v15 The Message). But he went on to say that "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (1 Cor.15v20).

So if believing in the resurrection is to tell the *truth* about God, doesn't it logically follow that to deny or to disbelieve the resurrection is not simply to hold an intellectual or theological position but is actually to be telling barefaced lies about God?

Controversy over resurrection is not a new phenomenon. There was disagreement in Jesus' day too. In a discussion with a group of sceptical religious teachers, interestingly enough on the very subject of whether or not there was such a thing as the resurrection of the dead, Jesus said this to them: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." (Mt.22v29).

So why, says Jesus, do people struggle to believe in resurrection?

Firstly because people don't know the Bible (the "Scriptures"). By that He meant more than simply people not being familiar with the stories, but people failing to believe what they are reading and failing to take the time and the trouble to understand the significance of what had been written down. In the case of His own resurrection, of failing properly to comprehend the implications of Jesus being raised from the dead and the implications of His not being raised. What either of those positions say about who Jesus was and what He had come to do.

Secondly, we don't know the "power of God." Instead we have diminished God to the limitations of our own experience and imagination and reduced Him to the poverty of our experience and to the smallness of our faith, instead of allowing Him to expand our horizons to the limits of His possibilities.

This booklet is written so that we might have confidence in the Biblical accounts of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and that we might know that we can take these records at face value - not least because any other explanation is simply implausible.

But that is only the beginning.

When Thomas was faced with the reality that Jesus had risen from the dead, his response was not one of intellectual assent but of personal commitment to the One who had died for him and then had risen victorious from the grave. "My Lord and my God!" he exclaimed (Jn.20v28).

***Halleluiah! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Halleluiah!***

THE RESURRECTION – DID IT HAPPEN?

The New Testament is unanimous that it did.

- All four of the Gospels give it prominent place (Mt.28; Mk.16; Lk.24; Jn. 20 & 21).
- It forms part of the earliest Christian preaching (Acts 2v22-24,31-32).
- It forms the earliest confessions of faith (Rom.10v9).
- It forms the earliest creeds – statements of what Christians believe (Phil.2v6-11).

It was a literal and physical resurrection.

Here is St. Paul writing to the Church at Corinth: *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ **died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was **buried**, that he was **raised** on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he **appeared** to Peter, and then to the Twelve.* (1 Cor.15v3-5).

The logical (and surely the only) way of reading Paul's words is to understand that Jesus literally and physically died and was literally and physically buried; and then literally and physically was raised to life and was seen by His disciples.

Any other interpretation simply does violence to the text. How can one take Paul's words about Jesus' death and burial in a literal sense and four words later want them to be metaphor? And how would his original audience have understood those words?

Moreover, if we insist on taking the resurrection in a non-literal sense, then what price Jesus' death and burial? Did they too not happen in a literal sense?

The Resurrection is central Christianity.

Without the resurrection there would be no Christian faith (1 Cor.15v13-19).

Indeed Paul once emphasised the Resurrection to such an extent that his hearers thought that he was preaching about two gods, one called "Jesus" and one called "the Resurrection"! (Acts 17v18).



YET over the years people have done their best to explain away the Resurrection.

Listed below are **SIX** of the most common arguments against the Gospel accounts.

1. The Disciples stole the body of Jesus.

The account given in Mt.28v11-15 is in fact the true account of what happened. *"His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we [the guard] were asleep.."*

The disciples could not bear to think of Jesus' life ending in such tragedy and disaster. He had spoken about being raised from the dead and so they wanted to make it happen for Him. And having given up so much for Jesus they could not bear to return home as failures, with all their hopes and dreams in pieces. Used to working as a team, they got together and stole the body and claimed that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

BUT

Is such behaviour consistent with what we know of the disciples' past attitudes and actions? They had just spent three years with someone who claimed to be Truth itself and who reserved His strongest condemnation for religious hypocrites.

Is such behaviour consistent with what we know of their mental, emotional and physical state at the time of Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion? Far from being a well-organised team, they were scattered, fearful and leaderless.

And what exactly would the disciples actually stand to gain from such a deception?

Could they (and why would they) have spent the rest of their lives trying to persuade people of something that they knew not to be true? Would they have suffered prison, torture and death in such a cause?

Had they so abandoned their faith in God that they would give themselves to this lie?

And there was an armed guard at the tomb expressly to prevent any such attempt to remove the body (Mt.27v62-66).

2. The Authorities removed the body of Jesus.

In order to prevent the disciples claiming that Jesus had been raised from the dead, the authorities acted first and took the body away.

BUT

If you want to stop a resurrection story, surely the last thing you do is remove the body! And if they had removed the body, why didn't the authorities simply reveal it the moment that the disciples began to claim that Jesus was alive? It would have stopped the story immediately and stopped it once and for all.

3. It wasn't Jesus who died on the Cross but someone else.

Simon of Cyrene was press-ganged into carrying Jesus' cross (Mt.27v32; Mk.15v21; Lk.23v26). In all the confusion, Simon was crucified instead of Jesus. When the man on the cross cried out "*Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing*", he was referring to the terrible mistake that was being made, of him being crucified instead of Jesus

BUT

The reason that Simon was made to carry Jesus' cross was because he was fit and healthy and Jesus was too weak and enfeebled to carry it any further. So how do you muddle up two such different people – a fit, strong (black?) man from Libya and the tortured, exhausted man from Galilee?

Jesus' mother, aunt and His close friend John were all at the foot of the cross. So either they didn't realise that it was Simon and not Jesus on the cross, or they were all prepared to tolerate this innocent man suffering and dying in order to protect Jesus. And Jesus' religious enemies were also present at His crucifixion. Having tried and condemned Him to death just a few hours earlier, did they not recognise or realise that this wasn't the right man? And did the Roman soldiers also get it wrong and forget it was Simon not Jesus?

And how do we explain all the other words from the cross?

What happened to Jesus both then and for the rest of His life? Why should anyone have believed that He had been raised from the dead?

4. Jesus didn't die on the Cross – He only fainted and later revived.

People usually took longer to die than Jesus did. Indeed the Roman governor was surprised that He had died so quickly.

In the cool of the tomb and aided by the spices with which His body had been anointed, Jesus revived. The earthquake, which moved the stone

away from the entrance to the Tomb, also completed the process of bringing Him back to consciousness. The guards, already nervous, saw Jesus coming out of the grave and ran away. Jesus then put on the gardener's clothes and slipped away, leaving His disciples to believe that He had been raised from the dead. Or He was later found by the disciples and either persuaded them that He had risen from the dead or else they leapt unaided to this erroneous conclusion.

BUT

Crucified people took all sorts of times to die and Jesus had already suffered much at the hands of His Roman captors.

The fact that Jesus had died so quickly actually made the Roman soldiers pay *extra* attention to Him. Just to be on the safe side one soldier stabbed Jesus in the side with a spear whilst He still hung upon the Cross.

At best Jesus was a case for intensive care – whipped, crucified and wounded. Is it really credible that within hours He would have and could have convinced His followers that not only had He risen from the dead but that He was the victorious Lord of life who had triumphed over the powers of death and of hell?!

For the rest of His (probably very short) life Jesus would have had to stay in hiding whilst His disciples proclaimed this great deception.

The theory requires every one of the disciples to be extremely stupid, unable to realise that this seriously injured man was not in fact the Lord of Life!

"It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging and strengthening and indulgence, and who at last still yielded to his sufferings, could have given the disciples the impression that he was a conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life: an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could...by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, have elevated their reverence into worship"

(Strauss 19th Cent. Theologian)

5. The women and the disciples all went to the wrong tomb.

The women were upset and emotional and a graveyard at night is not the best place for calming nerves! They didn't know the area well

and it was dark. By mistake they came to the wrong tomb, where a young man told them *“You are looking for Jesus..who was crucified..He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”* (Mk.16v5-6), meaning, *“You’ve come to the wrong tomb, he’s not here. Look, he’s over there.”*

However, the women assumed that this young man was an angel telling them that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

BUT

The Bible accounts tell us that although it was dark when some of the women set off, it was *“just after sunrise”* when they reached the Tomb (Mk.16v2). So not pitch dark after all.

Why would all the woman immediately assume from his words that the “young man” was telling them that Jesus had been raised from the dead? It is not a logical conclusion to draw at all, especially as we might assume that the “young man” indicated the correct tomb when he said *“See the place where they laid him.”*

What the “young man” actually said was, *“You are looking for Jesus..who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.”* It is simply dishonest to take selected pieces of the text and to ignore the rest.

Even if the women did make a mistake about the location of the Tomb are we to assume that Peter and John made the same error? And did Joseph of Arimathea not know the precise location of his own tomb?

And did not the authorities also know the true location of the Tomb? After all they had posted a guard around it. Why did they not immediately take people to the correct location and produce the dead body?

6. The Resurrection appearances were hallucinations produced by the disciples’ grief.

The disciples were so upset and distraught that they simply could not and would not accept the fact that Jesus had died. Unintentionally and subconsciously they manufactured “resurrection” appearances in all the familiar places associated with their beloved Jesus.

Even today, people who have lost loved ones sometimes “see” them in familiar and expected places.

BUT

The whole point is that the disciples *did* believe that Jesus had died. That was why they *didn’t* believe the women who said that He was alive and that was why the two men on the road to Emmaus *didn’t* recognise Jesus - because they were absolutely convinced that He was dead.

And Jesus didn’t just appear in expected and familiar places. For example He appeared on a road leading out from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus to these two men who didn’t expect Him there at all.

St. Paul writes of Jesus appearing to over 500 people at one time. (1 Cor.15v6). That is quite a hallucination!

Medically these “hallucinations” do not fit into the usual pattern. Here they continue for a long period of 40 days (Acts 1v3), and then they stop completely and forever.

This “hallucination” could be touched (Mt.28v9; Jn.20v17 – literally *“stop clinging to me”*), could eat (Lk.24v41-42), and break real bread (Lk.24v30). Some hallucination!

In reality...on almost every occasion when Jesus appeared to His disciples they were *not* expecting Him.

It was not their faith that produced His resurrection appearance but His resurrection appearances that produced their faith.

WHAT HAPPENED ON EASTER DAY?

Who went to the Tomb?

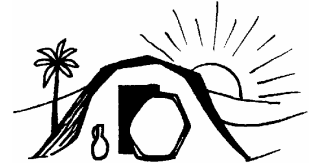
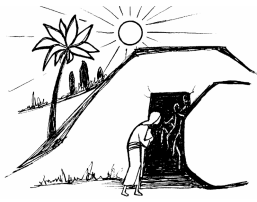
Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Joanna, Salome and other women from Galilee (Lk.23v55). John is particularly interested in Mary Magdalene, after all she was the one who brought the momentous news to Peter and to himself (Jn.20v1).

When and how was the burial stone removed?

This happened before the women reached the tomb (Mt.28v2-4; Mk.16v3-4; Lk.24v2) when an angel descended and rolled away the stone (Mt.28v2).

How many angels were at the Tomb?

There were two angels at the tomb, one of whom remained silent whilst the other spoke (Mt.28v2; Lk.24v4; Jn.20v12)



How was the news of the Resurrection received?

There was understandably, a mixture of responses –

- **Fear:**
at the sight and words of the angels (Mk.16v5-6,8; Lk.24v5) so that some of the women said nothing to anybody, indeed they “fled” from the tomb (Mk.16v8), whilst other disciples were “startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost” (Lk.24v37).
- **Disbelief:**
so that the women’s’ words were dismissed as nonsense (Mk.16v11,14; Lk.24v11; see also Lk.24v41). Thomas, too, “will not believe it.” (Jn.20v25); and see (Mt.28v17; Lk.24v38).
- **Puzzlement:**
the women are “bewildered” (Mk.16v8) and Peter leaves the empty tomb “wondering.” (Lk.24v12)
- **Belief:** - at least three levels of understanding:-
 - i] that something significant had happened, but what exactly, and what were they to make of it? (Jn.20v8-9)
 - ii] Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead but the full implications had not been grasped - “did not the Christ have to suffer these things *and then enter his glory?*” (Lk.24v25-27): “they did not understand from the Scriptures that Jesus had to rise from the dead” (Jn.20v9)
 - lii] that Jesus was Lord and God (Jn.20v18,28)
- **Joy & Amazement:**
(Mt.28v8; Lk.24v41; Jn.20v20)
- **Worship:**
(Mt.28v9,17)

THE ORDER OF EVENTS

1. A group of women go to the Tomb early on Sunday, to anoint Jesus’ body with spices. Some are coming from Jerusalem, whilst others like Mary, come from Bethany and thus begin their journey whilst it is still dark (Mt.28v1; Mk.16v1-2; Lk.24v1,10; Jn.20v1).
2. They discover that the stone blocking the entrance to Jesus’ Tomb has already been rolled away. An earthquake and the appearance of angels have frightened the guards away (Mt.28v2-4; Mk.16v3-4; Lk.24v2; Jn.20v1).
3. The body of Jesus has disappeared. An angel speaks to the women, telling them what has happened and giving them a message for the other disciples (Mt.28v5-7; Mk.16v5-7; Lk.24v3-7).
4. The women run back to the city to tell the disciples what has happened. They are greeted with disbelief (Mt.28v8; Lk.24v8-11,22-23; Jn.20v2).
5. However Peter and John (“the disciple whom Jesus loved”) do go to the Tomb and find it empty. Beginning to sense that something significant has happened, they nevertheless return home (Jn.20v3-10; Lk.24v24).
6. Mary Magdalene, who has gone back to the Tomb with Peter and John, remains weeping at the grave. Jesus appears to her (and to the “other Mary”). (Jn.20v11-18; Mt.28v9; Mk.16v9).
7. That same day Jesus also appears to Peter (Lk.24v34; 1 Cor.15v5); to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk.24v13-32; Mk.16v12-13); and to all the disciples in Jerusalem (except Thomas, who absent) (Jn.20v19-23; Lk.24v36-43; Mk.16v14).
8. The next week He also appears to Thomas now reunited with the other disciples (Jn.20v24-31).

On other occasions

9. He appears to Peter and to six others in Galilee (Jn.21v1-25).
10. He appears to over five hundred followers at one time (1 Cor.15v6).
11. In a glorified form, He appears to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9v1-8; 1 Cor.15v8).



- The Resurrection tells us that life in heaven will be a physical life, not some unreal disembodied existence. A body that is similar and yet different to our present one, even as Jesus' resurrected body was similar yet different to His earthly body. It also tells us that we shall retain our own personhood and identity in heaven, not be lost like some drop in a vast ocean (1 Cor.15v35-53).
- It also shows us that the physical world and thus life here and now, is touched and even transformed, by heaven and by resurrection
- It gives added certainty to the Second Coming of Jesus. *"This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven."* (Acts 1v11)

DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

- It vindicates the whole ministry of Jesus. Jesus said on many occasions that He would die and would be raised to life. If He said this and it happened then we can know that everything else He said about Himself is also trustworthy and true.
- The Resurrection reveals who Jesus actually is. *"..and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Rom.1v4).
- The Resurrection demonstrates a total victory over death. Jesus is God and if He is not raised, then God can actually be defeated and even ended by death. As it is *"Death has been swallowed up in victory"* (1 Cor.15v54).
- The Resurrection reveals that Jesus' death on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sins and to reconcile us to God, was effective. The penalty of sin is death and eternal separation from God and on the Cross Jesus bore our sins for us. Because Jesus came back to life and returned to His heavenly Father, then we can be assured that the penalty has been paid and that we can now be reconciled to God.

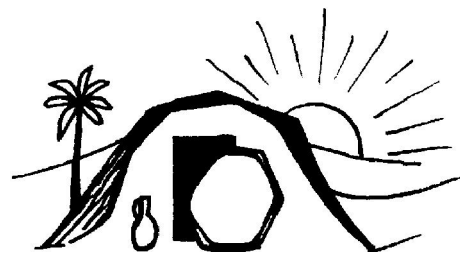
SO WHAT NOW?

If you are sure of the real and literal death and resurrection of Jesus, who died to take away your sins and mine, then give thanks with all your heart and commit your life afresh to Him

If you are not sure of the real and literal death and resurrection of Jesus but genuinely want to know, then there are people to talk to and books to explore, that can help you to the same discovery that Thomas made.

If you are sceptical about the real and literal death and resurrection of Jesus, is this because like those religious teachers, "you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God"?

If you are sceptical about the real and literal death and resurrection of Jesus, is this because you are not willing to be convinced or too proud to accept you have been wrong all this time and to bow the knee to God?



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.
(Rom.10v9)