

EASTER

Wouldn't it be so much easier if Jesus hadn't come back to life, easier for Jesus' disciples and much easier for us. Look at Jesus' family and friends. They arrive at the tomb in despair and confusion, just wanting to anoint the body and to tie up loose ends in their minds: another failed enterprise. "It seemed like a good thing, Jesus seemed the real deal. Now it's back to reality. File it away under Past Experiences and get back to real life." Back to your job, back to your family, a bit older and wiser.

It would be so much easier for us too if Jesus had stayed comfortably dead in his tomb; a good man, well intentioned, but wrong. "Real life's not got space for wacky spiritual stuff. You can't prove it so it didn't happen. What's a phony Messiah got to do with my job security, my family issues, and with washing the car?" It's not cool to believe in airy-fairy stuff; it's very cool and British to be cynical. And it's much easier not to try to believe; you needn't expect anything, you needn't have hope.

But if it's true, if Jesus did come back to life, well then, you have to face up to it. Those people who went into the tomb came out different people; they must have gulped uncomfortably and had to rethink their lives.

Jesus' resurrection means:

1/ He's still around today. Jesus died and came back to life, and never died again. A few people in the Bible were brought back to life, but later - obviously - died. Jesus didn't. That means he is still alive today. It's not history or ancient myth; it's about experience today. I can talk to him, have him speak to me, experience Jesus in my life today. That's uncomfortable sometimes, but it's thrilling!

2/ It means that everything Jesus said and did was true: that God does exist, that Jesus was and is God the

Father's way for us to get to know God, and that everything Jesus said about God and sin and forgiveness and heaven and judgment is true. It's not quaint ideas for fusty bishops and nice old ladies. It's true and it's thrust in our faces; we may not like it but we have to face up to it.

3/ It means that death is not the end, but that there is something stronger than death and darkness, and illness and despair. As Christians we are prisoners of hope, and of joy. Stronger than all the darkness, is light and joy. If Jesus rose from death, then I am on the winning side. Whatever happens in the future, God will see me through, and he is in charge. And he is preparing a place for me to be with him; my destination is sorted. And on the journey there, whatever problems I am facing today, they are in God's hands and he will help me through them. He will never allow me to be tested more than I can bear, and he will bring me through triumphant. Yes, often tired, often bruised, just as Jesus came through bruised and with the nail marks still on him; but triumphant! Whatever grot and worry I am going through, there is joy bubbling up in me. Joy is quite different from happiness, which is more on the surface. Joy comes bubbling up from deep inside, and nothing can stop the flow because it comes from God. In fact, I'm finding that in 40 years of being a Christian, the joy is just getting stronger!

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