

## **CHRIST IS RISEN!**

*Baptist Times* 24 March 2005

"If there's no resurrection for Christ", wrote the Apostle Paul, "everything we've told you is smoke and mirrors, and everything you've staked your life on is smoke and mirrors... And if Christ wasn't raised, then all you're doing is wandering about in the dark, as lost as ever... If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot". (1 Cor 15.16-18 Peterson, *The Message*) .

Yet, we have to admit that from a purely rational perspective belief in the resurrection of Jesus is absurd. Dead people do not rise from the dead. Death is always final. Or is it? Lord Byron claimed that there are times when "truth is... stranger than fiction" .

Faith in the resurrection has nothing to do with blind belief. Christian faith does not involve shutting one's eyes and with the White Queen in Alice believing six impossible things before breakfast. The great 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, was wrong when he stated: "I must put aside knowledge to make room for faith". Faith does not displace knowledge. The two can go hand in hand. Christian faith always involves reasonable believing – and this is true even if reason has its limits.

There is never a stage when we need to put aside knowledge to make room for faith - and this is true not least of faith in the resurrection. When it comes to the resurrection of Jesus, there is evidence to be weighed, there are facts to be considered.

Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham, has written a long and learned tome entitled *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. After weighing up all the evidence he writes: "I conclude that the historian, of whatever persuasion, has no option but to affirm both the empty tomb and the 'meetings' with Jesus as 'historical events'....: they took place as real events; they were significant events; they are, in the normal sense required by historians, provable events; historians can and should write about them. We cannot account for early Christianity without them" (709).

A very different book on the resurrection was written by Pinchas Lapide, a German Jewish Rabbi, who although not a Christian, argued for the resurrection as a historical event. He wrote: "I cannot rid myself of the impression that some modern Christian theologians are ashamed of the material facticity of the resurrections.... For all these Christian who believe in the incarnation (something which I am unable to do) but have difficulty with the historically understood resurrection of Jesus, the word of Jesus of the 'blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel' (Matt 23.24) probably applies". (131)

Yes, the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is overwhelming. In the words of Lord Darling, a former Lord Chief Justice of England. "We, as Christians, are asked to take a very great deal on trust: the teachings, for example, and the miracles of Jesus. If we had to take all on trust, I, for one, should be skeptical. The crux of the problem of whether Jesus was or was not what he proclaimed himself to be, must surely depend on the truth or otherwise of the resurrection. On that greatest point we are not merely asked to have faith. In its favour as a living truth there exists such overwhelming evidence, positive and negative, factual and circumstantial, that no intelligent jury in the world could fail to bring in the verdict that the resurrection story is true".

Christ is risen. Hallelujah!

## **EASTER PRAYERS**

### 1. A prayer of praise

Lord Jesus, we praise you, for you have risen from the dead! We praise you that by your cross you have defeated the power of the Evil One and through your resurrection we are now set free. Lord, without your resurrection our faith would be empty, and we would be without hope. But you are alive, and we rejoice and wonder in the mystery of your presence among us.

### 2. A prayer for our church

Lord Jesus, on this day of new life and freedom, we pray for our church. Lord, may our life together be characterised by new life and freedom. To this end, free us from the shackles of crippling guilt and life-denying legalism. Through our lives as through our words help us to proclaim the good news of healing, forgiveness, and hope.

### 3. A prayer for those experiencing darkness

Lord Jesus, your friends and disciples must have been utterly bereft at your death, with all their hope and purpose broken. so we pray now for those who are in darkness and pain today: those facing the keen disappointment of broken hopes; lives damaged by broken relationships and trust; people with broken hearts; bodies broken by torture and spirits broken by injustice. Lord, in the darkness bring light;

### 4. A prayer for those who are dying

Lord Jesus, on this day of life and resurrection, we pray for those who are even now going through the valley of the shadow of death. Surround them with your presence & peace. Give strength and comfort too to families and their friends as they see their loved one leave them on their final journey.

### 5. A prayer for ourselves

Lord Jesus, as we celebrate your triumph over death and the grave, may we also make it the model for our living. Help us to identify in our lives all that should rightly die - redundant relationships, tired habits, and fruitless longings. And by the power with which your Father raised you from the grave, resurrect in our lives faith, hope and love.

An Easter Blessing: May the God who shakes heaven & earth, who death could not contain, who lives to disturb & heal us, bless us with power to go forth & proclaim the Good News of Jesus, Crucified & Risen. And so may the blessing of God.....

