



Jesus tells his disciples that his death and resurrection are at the heart of his ministry.

Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?
(Luke 24.26)

The meaning of the cross

God made the world and loves the world, yet the world is full of chaos and suffering. God calls us to a close relationship with him. But we have turned away from God. Our hearts are restless. We are cut off by the walls of pride and guilt and fear of change. This attitude in itself is like a death, to the possibilities of life and salvation – the hope of heaven.

Christians believe that God sent Jesus to save us from our sins and their effects (the name Jesus means 'Saviour'). Jesus is all about transformation, changing relationships for the better. Ultimately that meant he died, as it were in our place, so that we can enjoy a new relationship with God.

The Bible speaks of the meaning of Jesus' death in the great images of salvation.

- *On the cross Jesus identified with our human predicament and took our place.*
- *As a friend betrayed, Jesus deals with all that destroys relationships and offers restoration.*
- *In his death, Jesus makes a new covenant between God and his people.*
- *In his death, Jesus pays the penalty for sin.*
- *Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*
- *In the cross, Jesus triumphs over all the powers of sin and evil.*
- *In the cross, Jesus identifies with all the pain and suffering in the world.*
- *On the cross, Jesus sets an example of perfect love.*

Jesus died upon the cross as a profound act of sacrificial love and redemption. This is central to Christian belief. There is a striking level of uniformity in the four Gospel accounts of Jesus death upon the Cross at Golgotha.

Atonement for Sin

Jesus opened wide his arms upon the cross in embrace. The crucifixion is an act of love, it is inclusive of all. His death served as a substitutionary atonement, meaning Jesus took the punishment that other people deserved, reconciling all people to God.

Fulfilment of Prophecy

His crucifixion fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies, such as those found in Isaiah 53, which describe a suffering servant who bears the sins of many.

Demonstration of Divine Love

The cross is seen as the ultimate expression of God's love—Jesus willingly endured suffering to offer salvation to all who believe.

Victory Over Death

Christians believe that through his death and resurrection, Jesus conquered death and all that separates us from God's love. By this Jesus opened the way to eternal life - heaven. Therefore, death is no longer something to be afraid of. Death has been conquered and Jesus goes before us to prepare a place for us (John 14.3).

Life - Resurrection

Eternal life begins now, after Jesus died and 3 days later rose again and we shall all be raised to life with

Christ. For Jesus gave his life for us. In response, we give our lives back to him in love and service. Like the first disciples, we are called to be witnesses to the power of the resurrection.

What is the evidence for the resurrection?

The empty tomb

Jesus' tomb was empty on Easter Day, despite the guard on the grave. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, where did his body go? If the authorities had taken it (and why should they?) they would have produced it when claims about the resurrection were made later. The disciples were as surprised as anyone by the resurrection.

Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and she told them that Jesus had said these things to her. (John 20. 18)

Soon after Jesus resurrection, the authorities set about killing Christians as they tried to silence the news that Jesus had overcome death. We too may find this both astonishing and beyond belief. Yet the disciples at the time were so convinced by what they saw regarding the resurrection of Jesus, they remained faithful despite appalling threats and violence against them, persecution and likely death for following the way.

The witnesses

More than 500 people claimed to see Jesus alive after his resurrection. Their encounter with the risen Jesus changed their lives too and they were prepared to die for their belief. The witnesses not only saw him, but they talked with him, walked with him, learned from him, ate with him and touched him.

They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24. 32)

The Church began

After the cross, the disciples were demoralized and defeated. They were afraid of the Jews and denied that they had ever known Jesus. Only a few days later they were risking their lives to proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. Their witness was to turn the world upside down.

What event (other than the resurrection) could have so transformed the disciples?

The testimony of Christians

For nearly 2,000 years, in every culture, men and women have claimed that we can know the risen Christ for ourselves, today. (1 Corinthians 15.3-6) The resurrection gives us a completely new view of Jesus, of death and of life.

The Ascension

The Bible says that after Jesus rose from the dead, he remained on earth for 40 days before he was lifted into the clouds to return to God, his Father in heaven. This event is known as the Ascension. See Luke 24: 50-53 / Matthew 28: 16-20 / Acts 1: 4-11.

Jesus and his disciples were gathered at a place called the Mount of Olives. A short time before, the Lord had instructed his disciples about his return to the Father, to prepare them for when he left them. He told them not to leave Jerusalem right away, but to wait for a special gift from God that would follow. Even though the disciples didn't fully understand what was going to happen, they follow Jesus' words. And he doesn't leave them comfortless – he promises to be with them always!

For reflection

Reflect this week on the meaning of the cross and the resurrection. Continue the Bible reading through Luke's Gospel.