

A week before Easter, the BBC released the results of a survey, which is as interesting as it is disturbing.

The survey suggests, exactly half of **all** people surveyed do not believe in the resurrection; of all the people surveyed who describe themselves as Christians in Great Britain, a quarter (25%) do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus!

The survey also revealed, 31% of all Christians believe word-for-word the Bible version of Easter events, and among "active" Christians (those attending a religious service at least once a month), 57% believe word-for-word the Bible version.¹

Interestingly, the church **IS** playing its role, of helping people believe in and trust God's Word!

The accounts of Jesus' life written by the Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, from His birth to the last days after His resurrection spent with His disciples, all were eye-witness accounts.

Peter says, *"we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but (we) were eyewitnesses of His majesty."*²

John affirms this, *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of Life, (we) declare to you, that eternal life which was with the father, was made known to us!"*³

The Jews of the time did not share a common understanding, what the Messiah would be like, but they held in common, two ideas about the Messiah.

First, as the people of the Jewish nation shared a common place of worship, the Temple in Jerusalem, they hoped the Messiah would renew

¹ BBC Website on 9th April, 2017 - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-39153121>

² 2 Peter 1:16

³ 1 John 1:1-2

worship in the Temple which was corrupted through the abuse of power and through commercial activity (remember Jesus upsetting the merchants in the Temple?).

The second idea **all** Jews held in common was, the Messiah would be a powerful military-type leader who would overthrow Israel's enemies and demonstrate his Kingship.

This expectation goes back several thousand years, when the Hebrew people were well settled in the land to which God had led them, during the time of the prophet Samuel. His sons were so corrupt, perverting justice and taking bribes, the people demanded of Samuel, a king like the nations around them.⁴

Clearly, Jesus did not fit into either of these ideas. He came in peace and died in the prime of His life as a common criminal. The scholar and author Tom Wright points out, the people accepted a failed messiah for there were many who came and went, and the people held in reverence God's Messiah to come, but *"The category of failed but still revered Messiah, however, did not exist. A Messiah who died at the hands of the pagans, instead of winning [God's] battle against them, was a deceiver"*.

Death on the cross was one thing, but now, talk about *"resurrection"* was another. Jesus had spoken about His resurrection to His chosen disciples, but it is difficult, and it takes time, to connect what we have heard and have been taught in the past, with what is happening **to** us and **around** us in the present.

Perhaps you can now better appreciate the predicament, the confusion in the minds of those who had surrendered their lives to follow Jesus, not only *The Twelve*, but many thousand others! The question people did not talk about, but was on their minds was, *should they cut their losses, chalk it up to a misguided zeal and misdirected experience, and move on?*

⁴ 1 Samuel 8

There are several ways in which **we** can view Easter. We can view Easter as a “historical reality”; historians and social commentators of the day have confirmed, a man named Jesus was indeed crucified by the Romans, having been handed over to them by the Jewish religious leaders, and several noted, not personal encounters, but reports of His resurrection.

We can also view Easter as a divine event: at the appointed time, God dealt with the problem of sin, caused by evil which leads to death. I suggest we take both views: Easter is an historic reality **and** a divine event.

As I read the Easter narratives every year, I am increasingly of the belief, Easter is about people. God comes to us as one of us, *God **so** loved everyone human being who ever lived in this world, He gave (offered) His Son Jesus to die on the cross, that anyone who simply and sincerely believes in Jesus’ mission from God, will be preserved for life in eternity with God.*

God’s mission is about people, and the accounts and narratives on Easter are rich in dialogue! The dialogue in the upper room leading to Jesus’ last passover supper and also during the meal, the dialogue between Jesus and His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane which we refer to as the High Priestly Prayer, the various conversations between Jesus and those who “judged” Him during His final hours, including the last but very significant dialogue between Jesus and Pilate, are all rich in content about God and His plans and purposes for all people.

Luke uses the narrative of two people, walking home to Emmaus from Jerusalem, mid-afternoon on Resurrection Day, to tell us of the torment in the mind of the Jewish nation and among Jesus’ followers, about His death and resurrection: *What exactly happened? What then was all this about?*

Two men were walking back home down a dusty road in a westerly direction from Jerusalem, the afternoon sun in their eyes, discussing the events of the past several days, trying to make sense of what had happened. People across Jerusalem spoke in hushed whispers about

Jesus' arrest and crucifixion; now news of his resurrection earlier in the day, left people really baffled.

A nation had pinned its hopes on what they thought should have happened, based on their understanding of prophecy in Scripture. This was **not** the way it should have happened. One of the two travellers said, *We had hoped He was going to redeem and save us (the Jews) at this time.*

The first lesson we learn is, prophecy is revealed to anyone who actively seeks understanding from God's Word, which is what these two friends were doing - reviewing what had happened, seeking meaning and understanding. They were practicing the wisdom of their sacred texts, *GOD grants wisdom; His every word is a treasure of knowledge and understanding*, perhaps remembering Jesus' teaching, *"Ask and it will be given to you. Search and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you. The one who asks will always receive; the one who is searching will always find, and the door is opened to the man who knocks."*⁵

The second lesson we take from this narrative is, when we **earnestly try** to understand the events around us, God gives us understanding. In the case of these two friends, Jesus draws alongside and shines light on God's word, words the prophets had spoken in the distant past, and explains it.

Today, we have the Holy Spirit, to guide us into all truth, guide our understanding and direct our thinking. I will be first to admit, there are times when this understanding is difficult to share with another, because God does not reveal Himself to a person who is not sincerely seeking Him.

The two friends, explained to the traveler, whom they did not know was Jesus, their twin predicament: *we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel*, and *some women among us believers, amazed us with the news, Jesus was alive!* The statement is not about the credibility of women, it is about the incredulity of the resurrection of Christ, the accomplished Messiah.

⁵ Matthew 7:7-8 (JB Phillips)

So, beginning with Moses and all the prophets Jesus interpreted for them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself.

It wasn't, however, until they sat down to the meal, when Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them, that their eyes were opened and they recognised Him. Jesus was *demonstrating* how to practice the new tradition He asked the disciples to follow during His last passover, when He said, *Whenever you do this (breaking of the bread), do it in memory of Me, my body which was broken for you.* Right before them, the newly set tradition of breaking bread at ordinary, regular mealtimes, and proof of the promise of His resurrection, both come together!

This was a powerful moment for the two travellers. Not only did they encounter Jesus in person, but they were so excited, within the hour, in the darkness of night, they hurried back to Jerusalem as fast as they could, to share the news with the other disciples, what had happened on the road, and *how Jesus was made known to them, **in the breaking of the bread!***

As you journey through life, you have a daily opportunity, whether you slice bread, tear it, or cut it, to remind yourself of the Easter message.

Paul tells Christians in Ephesus, "*God chose us to be in His image before the foundation of the world, that we should be people holy and without blame before Him, in love.*"⁶ We must decide what we are going to do, with the reality of what God has done!

This period, after Easter and before Pentecost, is a 50-day period of preparation, after the incredible and stupendous events of Jesus' crucifixion and His resurrection. Luke tells us, *after the risen Jesus had instructed the apostles whom He had chosen, He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering, by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days telling them about the Kingdom of God.*⁷

⁶ Ephesians 1:4

⁷ Acts 1:2-3

Jesus prepared them what what was to come on the day of Pentecost, the day they were released in the power of God, to carry the message of the resurrection into the world.

Will you take advantage of the great privilege given to us, to discover God, get to know Him and align our lives, to His desire for us?

AMEN