

Talk Number Six

# We can enjoy God's new world because of Jesus



From time to time in the news there are cases of people with terrible diseases who want to be allowed to 'die with dignity' - what we call 'euthanasia'. One of the most significant reasons they give to explain their actions is because they see no purpose in living when they are completely helpless. They no longer want to be a burden on others and they no longer want to suffer the indignity of total care. I suspect that none of us would enjoy the experience of being helpless. We talk about 'being waited on hand and foot'. It sounds great, but in reality we would soon get tired of it. It is normal for humans to be self-sufficient, and is seen as weakness and an indignity to be dependent.

One of the difficulties for parents is managing the transition of their children into adulthood; from dependence to self-sufficiency. So much advice given to young people amounts to 'stand on your own two feet' and 'get out and make your own way in the world'. The world loves high achievers. We love people who 'do it for themselves'.

This is one reason why Christianity is so offensive to people. At the heart of Christianity is the fact that people are helpless. In terms of our relationship with God, we are helpless. We all know the world we all want, but we are helpless to bring it about. No matter how hard we dream or how hard we work, the world we all want escapes us. Even our own private world is not all we want it to be.

The harsh reality is that Christianity has no hope at all for us unless we are prepared to admit two uncomfortable truths:

1. *We are guilty* - *this* world is not the world we all want because we are not the people we want to be or should be.
2. *We are helpless* - we may not like it, but we can do nothing about it.

Left to ourselves we will keep getting it wrong. We keep spoiling our world. Maybe you have read the novel by William Golding called 'Lord of the Flies'. It tells the story of a group of boys who, because of a plane crash, find themselves on a deserted island. They seem so innocent to begin with, but as the story progresses they become cruel and savage. Take away the veneer of civilisation and the constraints of society and that is what we are all like. Paradise is lost because of the darkness of the human heart. This is what we are all like. We are trapped - helpless captives to our own natures. All of this is bad news.

But the climax of the Bible is the story of a man called Jesus. Everything in the Bible up to this point has been pointing to him and preparing for him. As we saw in session two, Jesus gives us a glimpse of the world we all want. He healed the sick, raised the dead, fed the hungry and controlled the elements. Yet this wonderful life ended in death. Is this the end of our dreams of the world we all want?

The answer is a loud, emphatic and resounding 'No'! The death of Jesus is not the end because of the special nature of his death and what happened afterwards.

### **1. Jesus dies in our place**

The death of Jesus was a real death, but it was not an ordinary death. He did not die because he was a criminal or because he was a victim of injustice. Jesus died for us. He died in our place. He was our substitute. He did not deserve to be abandoned by God, but he took our punishment and curse on himself.

We are the ones who deserve to be abandoned by God. We deserve to be punished by God for our rebellion against him. It is as though we have been thrown into a pit, full of filthy refuse and excrement, and left to die. That is how God sees us in our sin. But Jesus comes, jumps in beside us, lifts us out and suffers in our place!

In this way, Jesus deals with the problem of God's judgment against us. God is rightly angry at the way we have treated him and spoiled his world. But God punished Jesus so that we would not have to be punished. God abandoned Jesus so that we would not have to be abandoned. Jesus willingly paid the ultimate penalty for our rebellion so that we do not have to.

Some people do not like this idea of substitution, of Jesus taking our place and being punished for our sin. They argue that if Jesus is God's Son and God punishes him then isn't it like some terrible cosmic child abuse? But the objection fails to understand something fundamental about Jesus and his death. Jesus was no ordinary man. He was not even just a special kind of person. He was God himself. By dying on the cross, and facing the consequences of our act of treason against a loving God, it was God himself who was paying the price. The Judge could only acquit the defendant because the Judge was also the victim of the crime and he was the one who paid the price!

As a result, people like us can be free to enjoy God's new world. We can be free to enjoy the world we all want!

How can we be sure? First, there is the torn curtain in the temple. That was a picture of an open door into God's kingdom. It showed us that God welcomes anyone who wants to come in. The curtain is torn from top to bottom. It is God's doing, not ours. Second, there is the resurrection.

### **2. Jesus begins the world we all want**

At the beginning of the Bible we saw that God warned the first man and woman that if they did not trust him and obey him then they would die. And so it was that when they ate the fruit of the tree God had told them not to they did die.

They died in the sense that they became less than they were meant to be. Decay set in. Worse still there was a spiritual death - separation and alienation from God. The wages of sin have always been death. Death is what sin pays to those that serve it. How cruel a master sin is - and yet we all serve it! We all do what it tells us to do even though the consequences are so terrible. That is why Jesus had to die. He had to pay the ultimate penalty: death with all of its horrors.

But the death of Jesus is not the end of the story! If it has been then there would be no good news. There would be no hope of the world we all want. But it is the Crucified

One who rises from the dead. The one who has taken the curse of death shows us that the curse is over. Death is not the end.

And that is good news! We wanted a world where there was no death. The resurrection of Jesus is God's promise that death is defeated. Death can terrorise us no more. Its sting has gone. The resurrection is the promise, and the beginning, of the world we all want.

Let me invite you to consider the resurrection of Jesus carefully. Consider the resurrection of Jesus for yourselves. Weigh the evidence carefully. If Jesus did *not* rise from the dead, there is no good news and Christians are sad, deluded people who are living a lie. But if Jesus *did* rise from the dead, then that changes everything. It means the remarkable claims of Jesus are true. It means his promise of a new world is true. It means we cannot ignore Jesus. He demands a response from us. His resurrection makes all the difference in the world.

On a personal note, the resurrection is the reason I am a Christian. It is one of the main things I go back to when I find myself doubting. As I have considered the evidence, I am convinced that it proves *beyond reasonable doubt* that Jesus rose physically from the dead. Allow me to show you just one piece of the evidence.

In an attempt to refute the resurrection, some people have suggested that the followers of Jesus stole the body. At one level it seems a reasonable suggestion, but so much of the evidence undermines it as a theory. History shows that the followers of Jesus went on to tell the world about Jesus and made some staggering claims on his behalf. Many people found those claims to be offensive and so they responded to them with violence. In fact, all of those closest to Jesus during his life ended their lives prematurely and violently.

It is perfectly feasible to say that they gave their lives for nothing because they were conned into believing Jesus rose from the dead. But to suggest that they were the conmen and then they died for the trick they played is just not credible. These men died because they were convinced that Jesus died on a cross, was placed in a tomb and then walked out of that tomb alive. It was not just a case of a Dead Man Walking, but more a Dead Man No More!

If Jesus rose from the dead what kind of response does he want from us? If his promise of a new world can be trusted how can we be part of that new world? These are the questions we will consider next week.