



CHRISTIANITY|**EXPLORED**

WHAT'S THE BEST NEWS  
YOU'VE EVER HEARD?

## **Episode 5: Resurrection**

Being reunited with those you love is one of the happiest experiences on earth. The familiar face, the reassuring voice, the comforting embrace. But imagine what it would be like to be reunited with some-one you thought you'd lost forever. Not just someone who had changed jobs or moved away, but someone you thought you would never see again, never could see again.

When we think of those friends and family we've lost, it's devastating to think that they've gone. However hard we try, no medical or industrial advance can stop death from winning. Bodies, like these buildings, fall into disrepair and eventually fall apart.

Only one man in history has demonstrated absolute power and authority over death. He knew beforehand exactly how and when his own death would happen. And even more remarkably, he repeatedly claimed that he would be raised to life on the third day after his death:

*"He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."* (Mark 8:31)

*"He said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.'"* (Mark 9:31)

*"Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit*

*on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.'"* (Mark 10:32-34)

So much hangs on this. Because if Jesus was right, in advance, about his own res-urrection from death, then it means he's trustworthy. He's not a liar and he's not a lunatic. It proves that we can trust him.

It also proves that there is genuine hope in the face of death. If Jesus really was raised from death, then we can be too.

But if Jesus was wrong about this, then Christianity is founded on a lie.

So how can we be sure about Jesus' staggering claim? First of all, we need to know that Jesus really did die.

At the end of his account of Jesus' death, Mark focuses on three women who have watched him suffer and die.

Not only have they watched him die, but two of them also watch him being buried. Mark tells us:

*"Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid."* (Mark 15:47)

There's clearly no doubt in their minds that the only fit place for Jesus at this point is a tomb. Later, we read that they "bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body" (Mark 16:1).

These spices were used to embalm the dead. You wouldn't buy spices like that unless you were expecting to find a corpse.

But it wasn't only the women who were sure of Jesus' death.

*"As evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the*

*Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph."* (Mark 15:42-45)

It was unusual for crucifixion to result in death so quickly, so the Roman governor Pontius Pilate questions the centurion. The centurion confirms that, yes, Jesus was already dead.

Now, the Romans had many talents, but when it came to killing people, they were experts. If a centurion said someone was dead, he really was dead. Satisfied with the centurion's words, Pilate gives Joseph permission to remove the body from the cross.

*"So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb."* (Mark 15:46)

As Joseph personally takes down the body from the cross, wraps it in linen, then places it in a tomb that was closed with a huge, heavy stone, he sees and feels nothing to suggest that the body was anything other than a corpse.

The evidence unanimously points to the fact that Jesus was dead. The disciples believed they would never again see Jesus alive.

In other words, Pontius Pilate, the centurion, Joseph of Arimathea and the women were all absolutely certain that Jesus had died.

The evidence unanimously points to the fact that Jesus was dead. The disciples would never see Jesus again.

But Mark's Gospel doesn't end there. He records what happens 36 hours after Jesus' death, very early on Sunday morning.

*"When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, 'Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?'"* (Mark 16:1-3)

Once the Jewish holy day is over, the women return to the tomb where they'd seen the body being buried just 36 hours earlier. But they're about to get two major shocks.

*"But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed."* (Mark 16:4-5)

The first shock is when they see that the huge, heavy stone covering the entrance to the tomb has been rolled away.

Then comes the second shock as they go inside the tomb.

Jesus is nowhere to be seen. Instead, they see a young man dressed in a white robe. He tells them the reason Jesus is not there.

*"'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen!*

*"'He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"* (Mark 16:6-7)

The one they thought was lost to them forever, the one they thought they would never see again, was waiting for them in Galilee. The place they had first met him – where everything started.

Other biblical accounts tell us there were at least ten separate occasions when Jesus appeared to his disciples after his death. We also read that more than 500 people saw him at the same time.

And this was no ghost or hallucination.

He had a physical body that could eat and drink, that could be talked to and touched. As the years passed, many of the disciples ended up joyfully dying for their faith, simply because they knew beyond any doubt that Jesus was indeed raised from death. They had seen it with their own eyes, and no threat or torture could make them deny what they knew was true.

They had seen, firsthand, that Jesus had triumphed over death, so death no longer had any fear for them or any power over them.

But Mark is under no illusions about the outrageousness of this claim. He doesn't gloss over the struggle to believe what has just happened. In fact, he says this:

*"Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid."* (Mark 16:8)

Even though Jesus had told them repeatedly in advance that it was all part of the plan, it's still too much for them to fully understand or accept.

And it may be that it's a struggle for you too. The temptation may be to forget all the evidence we've seen about who Jesus

is, and what he said he would do. Like the women, our instinct may be to run away from the resurrection, and say nothing to anyone.

But just as death was not the end for Jesus, so it won't be the end for us. Remember the words of the young man in the tomb. He told the women to tell the disciples:

*"He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you."* (Mark 16:7)

You see, it is not only the disciples who will see the risen Jesus. You will see him too. Acts 17 verse 31 tells us:

*"For God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."* (Acts 17:31)

In other words, there will be a day of judgment for all of us. The resurrection guarantees that, one day, we will all be raised physically from the dead. And Jesus will be our judge on that day. The only question is, are we ready to meet him?

One man who certainly was not ready was Peter, the fisherman from Galilee who had been one of Jesus' closest disciples. The one who guided Mark as he wrote his book. Peter was the disciple who had earlier criticized Jesus for predicting his own death and resurrection. Who had fallen asleep when Jesus had told him to keep watch. Who had told Jesus, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you", and then, that same night, had denied even knowing Jesus. Not once, but three times.

We know that Peter felt the terrible weight of his own sin. Mark tells us that as soon as he disowned Jesus for the third time...

*"...Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.' And he broke down and wept." (Mark 14:72)*

Peter wept because he knew his sin had finally caught up with him. And there was nothing he could do to put it right.

But remember the words spoken by the man in the empty tomb, after Jesus is raised:

*"Go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" (Mark 16:7)*

It's a beautiful detail.

Having died to pay for sin, and having risen from death to prove that sin was truly paid for, Jesus wants Peter to know that he is included. If he would only trust Jesus, then all of his sin – every denial, every failure to love God as he should – would be fully and finally forgiven. The friends would be reunited.

One of the first funerals I ever took was for a professional musician called Stuart Spencer, who died of leukaemia in his late thirties. I saw him three days before he died, and I'll always remember my last visit to him. I was feeling emotional and without thinking I just said, "Stuart, what's it like to die?"

And I'll never forget his answer. He looked at me very calmly and said, "Rico, Christ has risen. The resurrection may be precious to you, but I'm going to stand before God in a few days' time. Do you have any idea how precious it is to me?"

You see, Stuart knew he was a sinner, just like Peter, just like you and me.

But he also knew for certain that Christ had died and risen for sinners. And because of that, he knew what awaited him beyond death: a real, physical resurrection of his body, a body that will eat and drink, be talked to and touched. A body that will never again see sorrow or suffering, disease or decay.

He also knew who awaited him, ready to welcome him. The familiar face, the reassuring voice, the comforting embrace.

Because of the certainty of the resurrection, Stuart could joyfully and calmly trust Jesus with his own death.

Can you?