

On the Third Day John 20:1-21

A Christmas Carol begins with: 'Marley was dead. To begin with.' Christianity depends on the life of a man who was dead to begin with. Is that believable?

The apostle Paul says that if it is not true, Christianity is vain, futile, and Christians should be pitied for believing it. So is the resurrection believable?

How can you know it's true?

1. Jesus was dead – to begin with: The Romans knew Jesus was dead on the cross, and speared his heart to prove it. Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped Jesus' body in cloths and spices, because he was dead. The people who handled Jesus' body were honest and upright people, not liars. And they knew Jesus was dead.

2. Jesus was buried: Jesus' body was placed in a tomb with no other bodies. When a body went missing – it was Jesus' body, no-one else's.

3. No one was expecting a resurrection: Joseph and Nicodemus were not expecting a resurrection, or else they would not have wasted expensive spice. The ladies did not return expecting a resurrection, but to anoint a corpse. Even though Jesus had told his disciples he would be raised, they were not expecting it, because the dead don't rise!

4. The body was missing: The body was in the tomb on Friday, but on Sunday the tomb was empty. Except for the grave clothes. Why wasn't the body there, and why were the grave clothes still there?

Could the religious leaders, or the Romans, or grave robbers have taken the body? No. Did the disciples? They had no reason to – and would they have given their lives for something they knew to be a lie?

5. The women were the first witnesses: Women were considered unreliable witnesses whose testimony wasn't admissible. If the church invented the resurrection, why have women as the first witnesses? Because they were.

6. The disciples were the first sceptics: The disciples did not believe the women. The picture is not flattering, but it is truthful. They were as sceptical of reports about empty tombs as any modern person would be. Yet they came to believe it, preach it and give their lives for it. The only explanation is that they really did see Jesus alive again.

What difference does it make?

- It gives you hope in the face of death and grief, as it did for Mary.
- It answers our fears, for the future and of others, just as it changed the disciples from fearful to courageous.
- It is the grounds of our going, just as it was the reason Jesus sent the disciples.
- It tells us Jesus is Lord – which changes everything.

Everything is different when you know that Christ is risen.