

So, what happens at death?

No-one can go through a funeral service without pondering on some of the following:

- where has the person gone?
- what has happened to the person's "soul"?
- is this just the end, and do we only have memories left?

Different religions offer different options; which one is right? Today we hardly give the matter any thought, until confronted with our first funeral. And then the questions tumble into our mind.

The fact is that death is a terrible barrier; no-one can imagine passing through successfully. However there is one man who has broken the shackles of death in his own body – and he must be the prime candidate for us to look at. Born to a Jewish mother in the first century, in the small country of Palestine, Jesus Christ – or, as he was known, Jesus, Son of Joseph, for all children were named after their family line – not only lived a remarkable life, and died a remarkable death, but came back from the grave.

That resurrection, of course, needs very careful checking, for if true it means that we have one man in human history who has broken through the death barrier. And since he told people to follow him, maybe there are some answers for us also.

In the four recorded New Testament documents written by Matthew, Mark, Dr Luke and John, are extremely accurate reports of the life of Jesus.

We also have a very detailed section from Paul, writing to the Corinthian church about the resurrection. Scholars and other people who know ancient history tell us that the reliability of these New Testament accounts is beyond dispute. Furthermore, historic and archaeological evidence for the tomb of Jesus being empty is very strong indeed.

If therefore Jesus was a real person, who really lived in a place we can identify at a very specific time in our history, and if he actually died and then vacated his tomb on the third day, as he predicted, we have a most remarkable man on our hands. What are we to make of him?

Here comes a man to earth, living a perfect life, teaching great truth, showing wonderful compassion, and then breaking through death.

In all the world philosophies, the way to obtain benefit is to keep to the rules, to follow what the great teacher says. It involves doing various activities, or digging into one's inward resources for strength. In the truth that Jesus taught, the very opposite is the case.

First, Jesus showed us that we are all rebels at heart. The way we live is due to a cancerous disease within us called "sin", to which we are all slaves. (John ch 8 vs 34.) If we do nothing about this then we remain under God's judgment!

Second, he made it clear that we are so glued to our rebellious life that there is nothing we can do to free ourselves. We need outside help. This is the main point of the great story known as the Good Samaritan. It took an "outsider" to intervene and offer help.

Third, Jesus didn't merely point towards the way we should go, he told people to "follow me". Of course if he was some con man, then this is foolish in the extreme. But if he was God in human form, come to rescue people like us, then we ought to take him very seriously indeed. We ought to turn away from all wrong living and rebellious attitudes, and trust him entirely with our life

Death is a strange experience. Our own will happen only once, yet we will find ourselves attending many a funeral of a friend or relative over our lifetime. As we face yet another death, is not now the time to get to grips with the only man who conquered death, and offers a way through to all who truly trust him?

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