

"After the Passion"

"(Life out of death)"

<u>Occasion</u>	Easter Evening Service at Therfield Chapel
<u>Day, Date & Time</u>	Easter Day 11 April 2004 at 18:30
<u>Basis</u>	Jesus' appearances after the resurrection
<u>Readings</u>	Mark 16:1-7; John 21:1-10, 15-19, but see below
<u>Hymns</u>	357, 453, 689 from Mission Praise
<u>Songs</u>	162, 155, 220, 219 from Mission Praise
<u>Author/Speaker</u>	Paul Rydon

Have you seen the Passion yet?

I can't recall such controversy
since 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' caused such a furore in the sixties,
though the issues are admittedly somewhat different.

Neither can I recall Christians being so divided in their reaction to a film.

Secularists have criticised the film for its alleged anti-Semitism.

Frankly I cannot see it.

Jesus was a Jew and so were his enemies.

They used the Roman occupation to rid themselves of this wonderful man
who claimed to be the Son of God.

It was the Romans who actually inflicted the savage beating
the harsh treatment
and the cruel execution on this righteous man.

It is unashamedly a Roman Catholic film.

Both Mel Gibson and James Caviezel, who plays Jesus in the film
are dedicated Roman Catholics,

hence it is unsurprising

that non-Biblical Roman Catholic emphases are included.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus appears much more than the Biblical record indicates,
yet the Bible tells us that she was at the cross as he died.

Nevertheless, many protestants are offended by this
and the excessive presence and images of Satan.

The sadism and cruelty inflicted on Jesus are overwhelming

and some think gratuitously over violent.
Yet we all know that Jesus suffered a cruel, but necessary death
in order to save us from our sins.

Yet the overall message of the film remains.

This innocent man,
who pleads with his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane to be relieved of his
commission
gives himself up voluntarily to the Jewish authorities,
allows himself to be falsely accused
and falsely sentenced to death.
Submits by an act of his will to the brutality and ridicule of the Roman occupiers
and dies an excruciating death at Calvary for us.

I had been told that the film left Jesus on the cross,
but that is not so.

In the closing scenes we see Satan defeated and cast into hell
(at least that is my interpretation of what I saw).

Then we are taken to the tomb
and we see the empty grave clothes
and Jesus sitting by them alive and well
and the dawn sunshine of Easter morning shines into the dark
recesses of the cave.

Like so many films,
we are left wondering what happened next?

The answer is 'life'
Life in all its glorious wonder
and in all its eternal splendour.
Not a life constrained by this earth,
where we all know that one day we shall die,
but a life that goes beyond this one into another world
a heavenly realm where God dwells
and where we shall enjoy that life with him for evermore.

How can we be sure?
Because Jesus has risen from the dead
and gone before us into heaven to prepare a place for us.
This is what Christians believe.

And the question is,
are we just gullible fools who will believe anything
to make life on earth a bit more bearable,
or have we good reason to believe that this is true?

It is not my intention to set out this evening to make a case for the resurrection of Jesus.

We could spend much time reviewing the evidence,
but others have done that to great effect
and I decided that that is not how we should spend these few
minutes that we have together this evening.

I refer you to the little book I commended early,
‘the Case for Easter’ by Lee Strobel, a former journalist
and ‘Who Moved the Stone’ by Frank Morrison, a former lawyer,
both of whom became convinced against their will
that these things were and are true.

But I do want you to feel the tensions of that first Easter Sunday evening
when the disciples and possibility other friends of Jesus
were once again in the Upper Room
where they and Jesus had celebrated the Passover on Thursday evening
– the meal which we have come to know as the Last Supper.

Their whole world had been turned upside down,
and the door was locked
for fear that they too might be arrested in some kind of mopping up operation.
It had been almost three days since Jesus was crucified
and they were still very frightened.

That morning, at dawn,
three of their women, Mary Magdalene, another Mary and Salome too,
had been to the tomb to embalm the body of Jesus,
but when they got there, he’d gone.
The tomb was empty.
They had reported this to the disciples,
but they were so defeated in their minds that they could not believe.

Nevertheless,
John and Peter ran to the tomb and they found it empty too,
but had left and gone home.

But Mary couldn’t leave.
She stayed by the tomb, weeping.
And it was then that Jesus appeared to her and assured her that he was alive.
Later that day, he appeared to Peter too!

While they were pondering these things, there was a knock on the door.
It was Cleopas and his wife.
They had seen him too.
They had set off for home a few hours ago.
They lived out at Emmaus a few miles down the road.

But apparently as they went along
they were talking about the awful things that had happened to Jesus
and even the reports of his coming back to life

when a stranger joined up with them and walked with them.
When he heard what they were saying he put another point of view.
This man knew the Law and the Prophets
and he explained how all the Scriptures predicted that this would happen to the Christ.

They were thrilled and excited,
because if he was right,
then Jesus was the Messiah after all
and the reports of his resurrection must be true.
As they got near their house,
they invited him to stay over
and as they sat at table,
Jesus (for that's who it was) broke the bread,
just like he had on Thursday evening,
and they knew that this was the risen Jesus himself.
But at once, he disappeared.
So they had hurried back in the dark to share their joy with the others.

And while they were still talking,
Jesus himself appears amongst them.
They thought they had seen a ghost,
but he was real.
He showed them his hands and his side
and he shared their meal.
This was indeed the risen Lord.

A week later they were together again and Jesus appears once more.
This time Thomas was present.
He too was convinced
as Jesus offered for him to put his fingers in the holes in his hands
and his hand in his wounded side.

After this, the disciples went back to Galilee
where Jesus had agreed to meet them,
but while they waited,
they were at a loss as to what to do with themselves.
Peter couldn't stand the hanging around,
so back he went to fishing.
But they fished all night and caught nothing.
As they returned to the shore,
a man called to them from the edge of the lake.
"Haven't you caught anything?" he asked.
"No, nothing", they called back.
"Then cast your net on the right side of the boat" he shouted "and you'll find some".
This they did and they did!
Who was this man who even knew where the fish were?
Hadn't they seen him somewhere before?
"It is the Lord" says John.
And Peter was over the side, before you could say 'Haddock'.

The risen Jesus was cooking breakfast.
And here occurs one of those special moments that stand out in peoples' lives.

Few can fail to recall
that brave, bold, tender-hearted Peter had failed the test of loyalty.
He would have fought with the sword,
but he could not cope with the apparent failure of his beloved Lord
to fight against arrest.
And so had denied his Master three times
just as Jesus said he would.

The time had now come for Peter to face his failure.
(We find the occasion in John's gospel chapter 21 verse 15 onwards.)
The English translation uses the word love in each case,
but the original Greek uses different words for love,
with different levels of meaning.

"Peter", says Jesus, "do you love me more than the others;
with that deep selfless love that would die for me?"
And Peter replies "Lord, you know that I love you deeply as a friend".
"Then feed my lambs", says Jesus.
But he hasn't finished with him yet.

"Peter", he says, "do you love me with that deep selfless love that would die for me?"
But Peter replies again "Lord, you know that I love you deeply as a friend".
But Jesus still hasn't finished.

"Peter, do you love me deeply, as a friend?" And Peter was hurt.
"Lord", he says, "you know everything. You know that I love you deeply as a friend".
"Then feed my sheep" says Jesus.

So the mighty risen Lord still stoops down to touch the life of one of his servants right
where he is.
He demands our undying self-sacrificing love,
but he accepts us as we are,
with what we have to give,
however small.

Peter would go on to lead the early Church
and to take the Gospel to the Jews as far away as Ephesus and Rome.
And he would die a martyr's death,
crucified upside down,
because he felt unworthy to die upright as his Master did.
Right now he is not strong enough
and Jesus meets him where he is
and restores him to a position of love and trust.

Jesus doesn't wait until we are good enough,
he stoops down in his mercy and picks us up just as we are
and restores us in his love

until we grow to be strong.

And so it was

some forty days after his resurrection,
they were all in Jerusalem once more.

And as they shared yet another meal,

he told them not to leave Jerusalem
until they had received from the Father,
the Holy Spirit which he had promised.

He would empower them to restore the Kingdom of God to Israel.

Later as they stood on the mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem,

he spoke those immortal words.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in
the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching
them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And lo, I am
with you to the end of the age”. [\(Matthew 28: 16-20\)](#)

They were to be witnesses for Jesus.

They had seen all that he had done in his ministry on earth.

They had witnessed his horrendous suffering, shame and death.

They had talked and eaten with him in his risen state
and they were to take that witness throughout Jerusalem,
Judea,
Samaria
and to the ends of the earth.

That was the task he set before these men.

‘And with that he was taken up before their very eyes

and a cloud hid him from their sight.’ [\(Acts 1:6-11\)](#)

- and that was the last time Jesus was seen on earth.

I was intrigued by an article in one of the supplements to yesterday’s Times.

Entitled ‘It’s only a matter of life and death’, the sub-title reads

‘Easter is not just a time for chocolate eggs and DIY.

There is still a spiritual message for our non-churchgoing culture.’

The author, psychologist Andrew Marshall, is making the point that ‘at the heart of
Easter is something powerful

from which even non-believers can benefit -
lessons about death,
forgiveness

and how we can make sense of the world.’

‘If we don’t acknowledge the existence of death’ he says,

‘how can we make the most of living?’.

‘The Easter story reinforces the idea of new life emerging from death.
Although Mel Gibson’s interpretation of the life of Jesus delights in the
suffering of the crucifixion
and skims over the resurrection,
both are equally important to Christians.’

‘Just as the happiest day in the Christian calendar could not have happened without
the saddest –
Easter Sunday and the Resurrection could not have happened without Good
Friday and the Crucifixion
just two days before.
Happiness and sadness are inextricably linked to one another.’

But there is more:

‘At the core of the Easter story is redemption.
Christians believe that Jesus died to deliver us from our sins
and restore us to a state of grace.
Redemption is something that we still crave.’

And to make his point, he goes on to describe how a husband and wife had to go
through forgiveness,
atonement
and redemption
as they struggled to rebuild their marriage
after the wife had strayed into an adulterous affair.

Finally he closes the article with the words;
‘Once the consumerism is stripped away,
can Easter still be the greatest story ever told?’

Though this article reeks of post-modernism,
I was intrigued to see that at least to some,
the Easter story has a relevance even to the non-Christian mind.

Indeed it is the greatest story ever told,
for it is true.

And because it is true
it is relevant to every man, woman and child in today’s society.
For it tells how God himself sacrificed his only Son
that we might be freed from sin
and how He restored him to life
so that we might be restored to God.

So there it is.

Tonight,
we present to you a Christ who is no longer a pitiable figure
covered in blood on a wooden cross two thousand years ago.
Nor do we give you a Saviour who has merely endured the wrath of God,
paying the price of our sin.

Nor do we give you just an empty tomb without a body.
What we present to you tonight on this Easter evening is a risen Saviour
who has not only beaten death and paid the price of our salvation,
but who is risen indeed
and returned to his former glory seated at the right hand of his Father
in the heavenly place where God dwells.

This same Jesus offers you tonight salvation and eternal life
in exchange for nothing,
for he has paid the price.

He is alive
and he longs to stoop down in love
and touch you just where you are,
just as you are
and accept your repentance
as you confess your sins and unworthiness before him
as he extends his love and his mercy to you tonight.

If you already a Christian,
then allow him to restore you
just as he did Peter.

But if not,
then come to him in all humility
and accept him as Lord this Easter day
as he reveals himself in all his risen life once again.

Talk to us afterwards if you wish,
but above all talk to him and receive him
and his gift of life.

May it be so
to the glory of his name
and to your eternal blessing.

Amen.

Readings associated with this sermon:

Matthew 28:8-20

Mark 16:1-19

Luke 24:1-53

John 20:10 – 21:22

Acts 1:1-14

Paul Rydon –
11 April 2004