

yet! But even if it were true, what would it prove? that he lost control and his ministry was suspended for three days? Well, what would it prove? This report of the women throws more confusion than light on the situation – at least before we could have met to the sacred memory of our Master.

For those two disciples walking to Emmaus, the whole perspective of the ministry of Jesus was transformed in the light of the resurrection!

- Read Luke 24.13-35. What was the basis of their more-than-ordinary sadness?
- What was the basis of their extraordinary gladness?

Who is He?

In the light of the resurrection, we acknowledge that Jesus did indeed have “authority to lay down his life and authority to take it up again.” He **could** have called down twelve legions of angels, but he **didn’t**! He **could** have come down from the cross, but he **didn’t**! He was in fact the one those disciples had hoped he was – “the one who was going to redeem Israel” (Lk. 24.21a). But he had redeemed Israel – and the world – by the death on the cross at which their minds had so much stumbled. They had failed to grasp the divine necessity of the cross (v. 26).

In the shadow of the cross – “We had hoped...”

In the light of the resurrection – both Messiah and Son of God!

- Consider – We can only look at the life and ministry of Jesus from our own time-frame **after** the resurrection. What difference does the resurrection make to our whole view of the life and ministry of Jesus?



Three studies on Jesus, his Cross and Resurrection
by Peter J Blackburn

1. Who is He?

During his ministry, Jesus made many statements and inferences about who he was and why he was here. Was he speaking the truth? or was he merely a fanatic?

This was the controversy that raged about his person among those who heard him. On the one hand, his authority was recognised (Mt. 7.28-29), the people glorified the God of Israel (15.31) and crowds welcomed him with “Hosanna to the Son of David” (21.9). But, on the other hand., there was an undercurrent of opposition. This is highlighted in 9.33-34, when the crowds said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel,” but the Pharisees said, “It is by the prince of demons that he casts out demons”; and in 12.23-24 where the Pharisees drew a similar conclusion in contrast to the amazement of the crowd, “Could this be the Son of David?” It is also clear in the attitude of the people of Gadara (8.34), in the unbelief of those at Nazareth (13.54-56), and in the charge of blasphemy laid against him (9.3; 26.65).

This violent reaction of folk to Jesus is quite understandable – his presence in the community just could not be ignored! If he was right in what he said, his presence demanded a radical change in their life and outlook. If he was wrong, he was the greatest imposter in history and the greatest enemy of true religion – and should be dealt with accordingly.

- Read John 20.30-31. Why was the question of who Jesus is so important for the people of his day? Why is it still important for us today?

The Most Daring Claim

Jesus made many claims, but possibly none so daring as the claim that he would die and rise again.

When he first told this to his disciples, they were so shocked at the thought that he would suffer and die that they seemed to have missed altogether the claim that he would rise again (Mt. 16.21; 17.22,23; 20.18,19).

When the Jews asked for a sign, the claim was given in this form, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (Jn 2.19). This was like the answer he gave to a similar question fired by some of the scribes and Pharisees – the sign of Jonah (Mt. 12.39,40). However, in no case is it more clearly stated than in Jn 10.17,18 - “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

I have called this possibly the most daring claim that Jesus made, because many of his claims were not immediately verifiable. In times both ancient and modern there have been those who have claimed divinity and sought after people’s allegiance – on what basis could such a claim be judged right or wrong? There are those who have attracted followers on the basis of miracles they are supposed to have performed. But the claim to have the authority to die and then to rise again...

Did Jesus have authority to lay down his life, or was he just the unfortunate victim of circumstance?

- Read John 10.17-18. Why would this be singled out as “the most daring claim” that Jesus ever made?
- Read John 2.19 and Matthew 26.61,63. They charged Jesus with blasphemy, and yet had nothing to say about a key piece of evidence!

In Control or Under Constraint?

We see him praying in the garden – “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Mt. 26.39).

There have been many discussions about what was meant by “the cup”. It seems clear that it refers to his suffering and death. But Heb. 5.7 tells us that “he was heard because of his reverent submission” – does this mean that the “cup” **did** pass from him (*i.e.* that we must search elsewhere than his suffering and death)? Probably we do wrong to limit this reference to Gethsemane, though undoubtedly Gethsemane provides the most telling illustration of these words. The prayer in the garden was indeed heard and he was given the strength to take the cup, in submission to the Father’s will.

The inference, then, is that he went forward to accept suffering and death, not as the whim of men, but as the will of the Father – under divine constraint, but towards men, composed and in control. He goes forward as the one who “has authority to lay down his life...”

We see him, confronted by a crowd armed with swords and clubs and led by Judas, one of the twelve. Peter reacts by drawing his sword in defense of his Master, but is told to put his sword away – “Do you think that I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mt. 26.53). (Note that, in his temptations, Jesus refused this aid in fulfilling his ministry – 4.5-7). He goes forward as the one who “has authority to lay down his life...”

We see him before Pontius Pilate, a man under heavy political pressure yet with a strong recognition of the innocence of Jesus. We can almost sense Pilate muttering under his breath, “I wish I knew who you were!” Perhaps the prisoner will speak if he impresses him with the seriousness of the situation – “Don’t you realise I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Humanly speaking, Pilate had that kind of power, yet Jesus answers, “You would have no power over me if it were not given you from above...” (Jn 19.10-11).

Jesus isn’t referring here to the general authority of the State, but to Pilate’s authority over himself. With this prisoner before him, Pilate is stripped of all authority but what is allowed him. As for Jesus, he goes forward as the one who “has authority to lay down his life...”

We see him on the cross, the one found innocent dying the same criminal’s death as two found guilty. We see him, submitted to the taunts of the passers-by, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” (Mt. 27.40). The religious leaders also called out to him, “He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said ‘I am the Son of God’.” (vv. 42b,43)

Did he have the power to answer those taunts by coming down from the cross? The crowd could never know that day – taunts unanswered, he continues as the one who “has authority to lay down his life...”

- In the story of the crucifixion, note Matthew 26.39,42,53,64; John 19.10,11; Matthew 27.40-43. Does the story suggest that Jesus was the unfortunate victim of an intrigue, or that he moved forward calmly in response to a higher will?

On the Emmaus Road

Claims or taunts – where does the truth lie? Was he the Son of God? Was he the promised Messiah? We had hoped so, but his crucifixion seems to put an end to that. And now some of the women of our company say they have seen angels who have said he is alive – please note, however, no one has seen him