

# EVANGEL

*The Good News of Jesus Christ*



**PASS IT ON**

## RELIABLE WITNESS TESTIFIES:

# Jesus Arose

### The big question!

**Are Christians on Easter celebrating a fact or a myth? Did Jesus of Nazareth truly arise from the dead after dying on the cross and being buried or is this simply wishful thinking, fiction by some loyal followers who were overcome by grief and could not accept the reality of his death? These are legitimate and vital questions everyone should ask themselves. After all, the whole Christian faith stands or falls depending on whether the resurrection is a fact or myth. Even the Bible itself testifies to this. Paul, addressing the matter of the resurrection of the dead in his letter to the early church in Corinth (Greece) also said: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).**

The gospel writer John also realizes that this question is of the greatest importance. Well, we are assured by him that the resurrection is a fact! After all, John himself was an eye and ear witness. He was there and in his gospel gives us the

account of reliable witnesses! John had also witnessed to the death of Jesus. After the soldiers had pierced the side of Jesus and the discharge clearly showed that Jesus had died John tells us: "The man who saw it has given testimony and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth and he testifies so that you also may believe" (John 19:35). Jesus' death was a fact, attested to by reliable witnesses but so is His resurrection from the dead. In this article we will focus on the events as they first unfolded early in the morning on the first day of the week when the faithful followers of Jesus first appeared at the tomb where he was buried. May I suggest you first read John 20 : 1 - 9? What really happened? Keep in mind that John wrote all this "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

### No hope

The burial of Jesus could not be completed on the Friday He died because they ran out of time: the Sabbath had begun! His friends therefore waited until the Sabbath was over to finish the traditional embalming of the body. This they intended to do at the break of the day on Sunday, the first day of the week.

It is striking that not one of His friends gave any indication that they expected anything to happen. Rather strange considering the fact that His enemies *were* concerned since they recalled that Jesus had predicted resurrection. His close friends, however, had no expectations. Their most beloved friend was dead. They only had to finish the burial. As soon as they could they returned to the tomb. Mary Magdalene even arrived there while it was still dark!

### More grief

Upon arrival at the tomb Mary receives another shock and she is even more devastated! Someone has violated the tomb, removed the covering stone from the entrance and stolen the body of Jesus and deposited it elsewhere. They can't even leave His dead body alone! She came running to Simon Peter and John and cried out: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put Him!" She did not stop to investigate, she did not wait but turns around and runs away with only one agonizing thought in her mind: grave robbers! She even misses the encounter with the two angels by the tomb. She does not expect anything at the tomb. Now she can't even embalm the body which was already delayed because of the Sabbath. Her tears run freely. Grief upon grief!

How did Peter and John react? They are just as anxious and concerned. They race each other towards the tomb. Each is filled with his own anxious thoughts, each one eager to get there as fast as possible. More evil happened to their beloved Jesus. John got there first and stooped down to look into the cave and saw the strips of linen lying there which were used to wrap up the body but he did not go in. Something holds him back to investigate this further. We can only speculate why he stayed out. Was it fear for entering a burial tomb? Was it hopelessness like it was with Mary Magdalene?

Slowly the scene unfolds before us. First there is the stone rolled away revealing the dark opening of the tomb. Then we see a bit further and hear about the strips of linen lying there but it is only when Peter caught up to John and enters the tomb that the final pieces of this

# From the Dead!

mystery fall together. God in His providence provided his doubting and ignorant people with the convincing evidence that Jesus really arose from the dead!

## Convincing evidence

What role did these strips of linen John saw perform? It was the local custom to wrap the dead body in strips of cloth to keep the arms and legs together while they also wrapped a cloth around the head to keep the jaw from falling open. If a body had to be moved it would remain tightly wrapped, the wrapping serving like a coffin. If anyone would have moved the body for one reason or another they would not have found the strips of linen left there. So this ruled out Mary Magdalene's conclusion that they must have taken away the body and laid Him somewhere else. Peter even observed that the burial cloth which had been around Jesus' head was folded up by itself, separate from the linen (John 20:7). If this was a job done by the enemies of Jesus they certainly would have avoided anything at all that could perhaps even hint at a resurrection from the dead. If *friends* would have done this it would not even have entered their mind to remove any of the strips of linen or the burial cloth. Their only intention was to finish the burial rites.

So if it could not have been his enemies nor His friends, who else could it have been but the Lord Himself? This was a neat, orderly and planned departure from the grave! The tomb is empty and the cloths neatly folded up in a pile because the one who was buried here left the grave! Jesus arose from the dead! His body is no longer here because a tomb is only for the dead and not for the living!

That is John's conclusion as well after he has also gone into the tomb. Then we read in verse 8: "He saw and believed." John, the writer of this gospel, wants to let his readers know that he is a reliable witness: he saw it and he believed! God himself gave convincing evidence that Jesus arose from the dead! First there was the stone which was removed from the entrance of the tomb. Not as if this was necessary to let Jesus out for after His resurrection closed doors and walls are no hindrance for His movements. But the stone was rolled away for the sake of his disciples to show that the grave had been conquered. The stone was not removed to let Jesus out but to let the disciples in! Now they could see the empty grave and the strips of linen all neatly in order.

Keep in mind that no human witnessed this great divine miracle of the actual resurrection of Jesus. For now the only evidence is the empty grave. When the angels tell the women that Jesus arose from the dead they point to this same evidence. They don't say: "Wait till you see Him" but "see the place where they laid Him, He is not here anymore!" That is the evidence that convinced John as well: "and he saw and believed." The empty tomb and the neatly arranged piles of cloth reveal to His disciples that Jesus truly arose from the dead. After this Jesus confirms this glorious fact by His appearances to them.

## Scripture and the empty tomb

Finally in our reading John adds an explanatory as well as an apologetic note: "They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead." We did

not know it, John says, we did not understand that Scripture said that the Christ would rise from the dead. We did not understand that this was a divine "must" and that we therefore should have expected this rather than come to all different conclusions upon seeing an empty tomb. Now we understand, John says. Actually John tells us in this note: "We should have looked for the risen Christ! We should have expected this to happen! We should not have needed this additional evidence but God's Word should have been sufficient for us!" Christ came to fulfill Scripture in His death as well as His resurrection. Paul reminds us of that in the well-known chapter about the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, as well: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

John admits: "We *could* have known and we *should* have known!" Jesus Himself always pointed back to the Scriptures, also when He predicted His own resurrection from the dead: faith in Jesus Christ is based on the Word of God and so is faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If the Bible is not accepted as the Word of God no evidence will ever convince anyone! May God also grant you this sound faith in the risen Lord and Saviour for only in Him do we truly have life and life for evermore. Learn from these same Scriptures what the resurrection of Christ means to those who believe in Him. You can do so by reading 1 Corinthians 15.

"Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

C. van Spronsen

# Cardiac Sclerosis

**I'm sure most of you have heard of illnesses such as multiple sclerosis and arteriosclerosis. What these illnesses have in common is the word *sclerosis*. *Sclerosis* is a word that comes from a word meaning *hard*. In other words, sclerosis is the hardening of something. In this particular case, the hardening of certain tissue.**

In the case of multiple sclerosis, there is a hardening or scarring of the nerve fibres. Normally, the nerve fibres in your central nervous system are protected by an insulating sheath. When multiple sclerosis occurs, the sheath is damaged, leaving multiple areas of hardening or scarring of the nerve fibres.

In the case of arteriosclerosis, there is a hardening of the arteries. As the disease develops, yellowish, fatty material composed largely of cholesterol is deposited as plaques along the walls of the arteries, causing them to become fibrotic, thick, and calcified.

Sclerosis of parts of your body is not a pleasant illness to have. For these parts of your body were not meant to harden, but remain the way they normally are. In other words, when they *do* harden, that will affect the functioning of your body in one way or another. Those of you who suffer from some form of sclerosis will know all about that. And those of you who have loved ones who suffer from an illness ending in the word *sclerosis* will know about this, too.

## **An incomprehensible illness**

But while most of you probably know about multiple sclerosis and arteriosclerosis, how many of you know about *cardiac sclerosis*? "Cardiac sclerosis?" you ask. "What is that?"

This question does not surprise me. For you will not find the term in a dictionary nor will you find the expression in a medical encyclopaedia. But you will find it in the Bible! Romans 2:5, for instance, speaks about people who by their *hard and unrepentant hearts* are storing up wrath for themselves. Romans 9:18 speaks about God hardening Pharaoh's heart (after Pharaoh had first hardened his heart against God). And Hebrews 3 warns us not to harden our hearts as the Israelites did in the desert (verse 8). It exhorts us to encourage one another daily so that we may not be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (verse 13). And it warns us for a second time not to harden our hearts as the Israelites did when they provoked God to anger (verse 15).

Cardiac sclerosis. It is such a serious illness! But also such an incomprehensible illness! For just look at the people of Israel about whom the writer to the Hebrews is talking! For years, they had been oppressed by the Egyptians in the land of Egypt! For years, they had cried out to God! For years, God had not intervened in their miserable situation! But then, God sent Moses his servant to them who told them who their God was: the LORD, Yahweh, I am who I am, the God who is actively involved in their lives and who can be counted on to do what He has promised.

How the LORD had lived up to the meaning of his name: I am who I am! How He had shown his power and almighty in humiliating the Egyptians during no less than ten plagues! How He had shown his majesty and splendour in leading his people Israel through the waters of the Red Sea! How He had demonstrated his goodness and mercy in feeding and sustaining them in the hot and barren desert!

Yet, in and through all of this and more, the people of Israel were blind to the almighty and power of the

LORD, were deaf to the voice of the majesty and splendour of the LORD, were unresponsive to the goodness and mercy of the LORD! They always grumbled. Always complained. Always murmured. Always rebelled. Always refused to believe.

That is incomprehensible, something you just cannot understand! Yet, something that is and remains true. And something that is caused by *cardiac sclerosis*, the hardening of the heart.

## **The development of the illness**

As multiple sclerosis and arteriosclerosis usually begin very slowly, so cardiac sclerosis usually begins very slowly, too. Slowly but surely you begin to desensitize yourself to the presence of God. You close your eyes to his almighty and power. You plug your ears to his majesty and splendour. You respond with unthankfulness to his goodness and mercy. You stop reading your Bible, you stop praying, and you stop going to church. Instead of taking in wholesome and nutritious spiritual food that is meant to keep your arteries open and clean, you take in all sorts of spiritual junk food that begins to leave plaques of yellowish, fatty material composed largely of cholesterol along the walls of your spiritual arteries causing them to become fibrotic, thick and calcified.

And then, what begins very slowly and occasionally, ends up being a full-blown disease. Your occasional insensitivity to the almighty and power, the majesty and splendour, the goodness and mercy of God, becomes an habitual insensitivity. And whereas before you could still see the almighty and power of God, hear the majesty and splendour of God, receive the goodness and mercy of God, now, with full-blown cardiac sclerosis, you can no longer. God is totally absent



in your life. And you live your life as if He does not exist.

You have become a sick man or woman. A very spiritually sick man or woman. So sick, you may even think you are completely healthy. In actual fact, you are a spiritual wreck. Spiritually completely dysfunctional.

Those of you who suffer from some type of physical sclerosis will know that that is all about. Perhaps, you want to walk normally, but you just cannot do so. Perhaps, you want to see normally, but you just cannot do so. Perhaps, you want to think clearly, but you just cannot do so. For the sclerosis, the hardening that has taken place either on your nerve fibres or in your arteries or somewhere else simply prevents you from doing so.

So, too, it is with cardiac sclerosis, with hardening of the heart. You may want to think and act very properly and correctly. You may even imagine yourself to be thinking and acting the way you ought. In actual fact, you are not. And you just *cannot*. For the hardening of your heart simply prevents you from doing

so. That is how sick, how very sick you really are.

### **The cure for the illness**

At the moment, there is no known cure for multiple sclerosis. However, for some forms of arteriosclerosis there is. Many people whose arteries are plugged, especially those going to their hearts, are able to solve this problem by undergoing a bypass. Sometimes, a single bypass. Sometimes, a double. Sometimes, even a triple or quadruple bypass. Veins are taken from elsewhere in their bodies and inserted somewhere around the blocked

arteries, allowing the blood to bypass these blocked arteries.

Once, these people have received their bypass, they begin to function better again. They breathe easier. They can walk further. They can think better. In short, they begin to function again as they were meant to function.

The good news is that with cardiac sclerosis there is also a cure. Not a cure involving a bypass operation, but a cure involving a heart transplant operation. Because of the Lord Jesus Christ, who allowed his arteries to bleed for the sins of his people and who laid down his life for the sins of his people, a new heart is available to all those who believe in Him. Through faith, their old calcified and petrified hearts are taken out and replaced with new hearts that are beating and throbbing with love and concern for God and one another.

This means that once you receive your new heart, you begin to function as you ought. You are no longer desensitized to the almighty and power, the majesty and

splendour, the goodness and mercy of the Creator of this world and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But you begin to see Him in this world in which you live and in your own personal life. And you begin to worship and serve and love this God the way He wants to be loved and served and worshipped.

### **Preventing the illness**

However, you do have to watch your intake. And you do have to watch your lifestyle. For there is an intrinsic connection between cardiac sclerosis and arteriosclerosis. People who suffer from cardiac sclerosis do so because they also suffer from arteriosclerosis. Their hearts become hardened because the spiritual arteries leading to their hearts have become calcified, fibrotic and thick. They have replaced the wholesome food of the Word of God, the use of prayer, and the worship together with God's people with the fatty substances of their own opinions, their own dependence and their own importance. And because of that they have deprived their hearts of the life-giving and life-renewing power that only God can give.

If you do not want to suffer from cardiac sclerosis, then watch your spiritual intake and your spiritual lifestyle. Make it your habit to read the Word of God and to go to the Lord in prayer much like you make it your habit to eat wholesome and nutritious food. Also make it your habit to work out spiritually by studying the Word of God and worshipping together with God's people much like you make it your habit to go to the gym or for a jog or a power walk. There is no need to suffer from cardiac sclerosis. Just use the means God has given to prevent it. Certainly in this case an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

Dick Moes

# Surely, Jesus will Rise from the Dead

## Bible Story

### Based on Mark 9:2-13

It is very exciting to be in Jesus' company every day. So many things happen all the time. Many sick people are healed and evil spirits are driven out. Besides, the Lord Jesus speaks so many wise words. Large crowds of people follow him everywhere to see his miracles and hear his preaching.

Quite a while ago Jesus picked twelve men to be his special helpers and students. They travel with him from town to town. They receive special lessons about the reason why Jesus, the son of God, has come to earth. It is very difficult for those twelve men to understand all the words of the Lord Jesus. They are not used to look at things from God's point of view. They want Jesus to be a great king who with his miraculous powers will make Israel a strong country. They find it difficult to believe that the Lord Jesus has come from heaven to suffer and die. And it is even more difficult to understand that Jesus will rise from the grave.

One day Jesus calls three of his special helpers to come along with him. A little bit surprised Peter, James and John follow their Master Jesus. Where would they be going? And why would not all his helpers come along? The four of them go for a long walk, away from all the people. They leave the villages behind and start climbing a high mountain. The winding road becomes more and more quiet. After a while they do not meet other people any more. The peacefulness is a welcome change from the hustle and bustle of the crowds.

Peter, James and John are tired when they come to the top. They find a comfortable place to sit down and stretch their legs. Enjoying the broad view they feel their eyes become heavy with sleep. Without realizing it, they doze off into a little snooze.

Suddenly they wake up. Immediately they sense that something is different. What happened? What do they hear? Who is talking? Is Jesus praying out loud to his Father in Heaven? How come the sun is so bright? Squinting their eyes they try to figure what is going on.

Their attention is drawn to their Master Jesus. Look, how he has changed! He is absolutely beautiful and splendid. His face shines like the sun. His clothes are white and glistening. His



whole person radiates light. Never before have they seen anything like that before. This must be the glorious light of Heaven itself. Spellbound their eyes are fixed on their Lord.

But look again. Jesus is not alone. There are two men with him, who also have a glorious appearance. Jesus and the two men are having a serious conversation together. Their tone of voice is sombre. No wonder. They are talking about Jesus' death. It will not be long before the leaders will kill Jesus.

Terrified Peter, James and John look on. But in spite of their fear they force themselves to listen. It becomes clear to them who these two men are. They are Moses and Elijah. All the Israelites know that Moses and Elijah are very special servants of the Lord. A very long time ago Moses was the leader of the God's people. It was Moses who gave all God's laws to the Israelites. Many years later the prophet Elijah passed on God's messages of warning. He reminded Israel to keep obeying those laws that Moses had given.

Peter cannot keep quiet any longer. "Master! What a good thing James, John and I are here. We can make huts for you, Moses and Elijah." But Jesus does not interrupt his conversation with the heavenly visitors to answer Peter.

Then a cloud covers Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Peter and his friends cannot see their Master anymore. It makes them even more scared. But though they are very frightened, they clearly hear a loud

voice from heaven. "This is my dear Son; listen to him!!"

All of sudden the cloud is gone, and with it Moses and Elijah. Jesus stands beside them again in his normal clothes. Dumbfounded Peter, James and John start following their Master on the way down. They are filled with more respect and awe for Jesus than ever before. To their relief Jesus talks to them again. "Don't mention anything about what you have seen here," Jesus tells them. "You can do that after I have risen from the dead."

Peter, James and John know now very well that Jesus will have to die. They still have some trouble understanding that Jesus will rise from the dead. How can that be? But with their own eyes they have seen the heavenly glory that Jesus will receive. And with their own ears they have heard the voice from heaven. The voice told them to listen to their Master. That is what they will do. They will believe his words. He will rise from the dead.

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After Jesus rose from the grave Peter, James and John gladly shared with their fellow believers what they had seen and heard on the mountain. It gave them the strength and courage to preach the good news about Jesus. Their Lord and Master had died on the cross for the sins of his people. But he has risen from the dead to give a glorious life to those who listen to His Words.

Jane

# In Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek

**Pontius Pilate had it with the people of Jerusalem. They had bullied him into sentencing the Lord Jesus to death. He had wanted to let him go, but the Jews had said: "If you let him go then you are not Caesar's friend." If that were to have gotten to the ears of Caesar in Rome, it would not have gone very well for Pilate. And so he gave in and handed Jesus over to be crucified. But he got in one last jab.**

It was customary in those days to put a sign on a person's cross which stated the charge. The sign might say: Murderer! Or: Thief! Or: This man led a revolt against Rome. The clear message to anyone who came by and saw the suffering wretch on the cross was: This is what we do to murderers. This is how we deal with thieves. If you have any notion of revolting against Rome, you'd better forget it, because this is where you'll end up. It was meant to keep the masses in submission. A rather effective deterrent.

Pilate took advantage of this custom to get revenge against those who had cowed him into sentencing Jesus. Earlier Pilate had brought the Lord out in front of the howling masses. He had pointed at Jesus and said, "Behold your King!" The people had shouted, "Away with him; crucify him." Then Pilate had asked, "Shall I crucify your King?" To that they responded, "We have no king but Caesar."

And so Pilate had given the order for Jesus to be crucified. He's in a foul mood. He's angry at the people for forcing his hand. He takes a parting shot. At the end of it all, he gets the last laugh. On the sign he writes, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Here's your king, you wretched people." Pilate is at his most cynical, his most sarcastic. "You say that Caesar is your king. Forget it. This is your king. This broken wretch, bleeding and dying – this naked man stripped of his robes and his dignity – this is your king!"

The chief priests understood exactly what Pilate was doing here. They realized that he was insulting

them. And so they went to him and said: "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate refused. He answered them: "What I have written, I have written."

Let's look at the sign for a moment. Pilate wrote it in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. Three times he wrote: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. First in Hebrew, then in Latin, then in Greek. You could say that the name and title of the Lord Jesus was written out in all the languages of the world.

We already see some irony here. He was called: *The king of the Jews*, but his name was written in the languages of the world. He is called the king of some little sect, but the title truly had universal significance.

*Hebrew* was the language of the Jews. This was all happening on the eve of the Jewish Passover festival. All the Jewish pilgrims coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the ceremony of the Passover lamb could read the sign and see the Lamb of God on the altar of the cross. Golgotha was just outside the city, on one of the roads entering the holy city.

*Greek* was the language of culture, of writing, of stage productions and philosophy. You were not truly civilized unless you knew Greek. The Greeks called any non-Greek speaking person a barbarian.

*Latin* was the language of law and order. It was the language of government and of the armies of Rome.

The sign was written in these three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The language of the land, of the world, of the law courts. Of Zion, of Athens, and of Rome. Pilate wrote the

sign in the language of religion, of culture and of military might. The ancient east, the emerging west, and of the new world empire.

Pilate was being sarcastic. This man – a king? He presents Jesus of Nazareth as the unsuccessful dictator of a pathetic little group of people in some distant province of the Roman Empire. This man – a king?

Oh yes, Pilate. This man is a king. King of the Jews? Well, yes, but of more than just the Jews. You wrote the sign in the languages of the world, didn't you Pilate? This man is not only the king of the Jews. He is the king of the world.

As the Lord himself said in Jn. 12:32, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself." He will draw to himself every tribe, every tongue, every people and nation.

What Pilate has written he has written. And, unwittingly, he has written truthfully. Pilate became a prophet. The Spirit of God spoke through him. The sign Pilate put on Jesus' cross fulfilled Ps. 96:10 – "Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns.'" The one who gave himself as a sin offering on the altar of Golgotha is the King of the nations. King of the Jews! King of the world!

But the question is: Is he the king of your heart?

What is written on your heart? Is there a title etched deeply into your heart which says, "JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF MY HEART?"

The King reigns from the wood of the cross. Does he reign in your heart?

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George van Popta

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