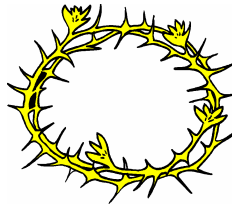


A full e-mailbag

I received more feedback from my last News Letter than from any previous one I can remember – from India in the east to the USA and Peru in the west! Part of the feedback was in connection with my reflections on India, and the value system of the Christians there. But most of it was in response to my review of Mel Gibson's controversial film *The Passion of the Christ*.



More Passion?

The film is now on general release in the UK and it will be interesting to see what impact it has on the cinema-going public. For all its many inadequacies, we should pray about the film with the same spirit Paul had, when he was faced by rival preachers of mixed motives.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ... But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.
[Philippians 1.15,18]

We should pray that the film will create a spiritual hunger in its viewers' hearts, so that they are moved to seek after the truth about Jesus. And the truth about Jesus is not just that he endured a great 'passion' (i.e. suffering), but that he accomplished a great resurrection.

Victor, not just victim

One weakness of the film is that it seems to present us only with a victim, not a true victor. A victim may evoke pity on our part, or admiration of someone's ability to endure great suffering and pain without course to retaliation or violence in return. But a response of pity or admiration towards Jesus is never adequate. His resurrection demands that we own him as Lord.

This is what Peter brought out so clearly, as his Pentecost message moved towards its climax.

*Let all Israel be assured of this:
God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified,
both Lord and Christ.*
[Acts 2.36]

Beyond mere belief

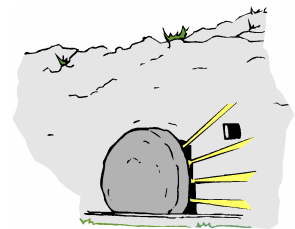
One of *The Passion's* viewers confessed after seeing the film that she was "a believer, but it's not central to my life." That's not an option if we truly believe that God has made Jesus Lord over all. If he is truly Lord, he must be given his rightful place as the Lord of lives, enthroned at the centre. *In your hearts* [i.e. at the very core of our being] *set apart Christ as Lord*, 1 Peter 3.15 urges us.

Worship the winner!

This is the great truth we celebrate at Easter - God has made his Son Lord of all. It is why we gather week by week in church - not simply to remember a heroic victim, but to *worship a living winner!*

Jesus Christ our Lord was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.
Our Saviour, Christ Jesus, has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.
Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, ... This is my gospel.
[Romans 1.4; 2 Timothy 1.10; 2.8]

God's good news to us is not simply that *Jesus our Lord was delivered over to death for our sins* – wonderful though Christ's great act of self-sacrifice was on our behalf and something we should always be mindful of. God's good news is that *Jesus our Lord was raised to life for our justification* [Romans 4.25]. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is like God's receipt to us. It is tangible proof that our sins really have been atoned for,



and that our debt of guilt really has been paid off by Jesus on our behalf.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reminds us that were it not for Christ's resurrection, there would be no Gospel for us to celebrate at Easter – or at any other time of year.

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins – and those 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. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
[1 Corinthians 15.17-20]

This is what we are preparing to celebrate once again this Easter- the glorious truth that Christ has conquered sin, death, and Satan through his own death - and resurrection.

Celebrating Easter

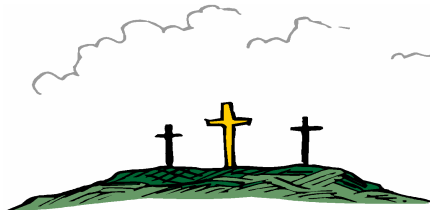
We begin our celebrations with our ...

⇒ **Palm Sunday services**, at 11.00am and 6.30pm on **4th April**. The evening service will include communion, as we conclude our journey through *The Week that Changed the World*, by meditating on the crucifixion.



⇒ **Tuesday 6th April** is the night for our special **Easter Outreach Evening**, as part of our 'Food and Fun for all the Family' programme. Quizzes, games, and a showing of *The Story of Easter* video are on the menu – as well as hot-cross buns!

⇒ **Good Friday** falls on **9th April**. Between 12 noon and 2.00pm we will be remembering our Lord's supreme act of self-sacrifice for us, an informal mixture of Bible readings, songs and prayers. A light lunch will also be served.



⇒ **Easter Day** is **11th April**. We will be celebrating our Lord's resurrection with an **All-Age Service** at 11.00am, and sharing in the joy of our second **Baptismal Service** within nine months in the evening. Remember Ray and Val Hill as they testify to their faith in Jesus in the way he has commanded us.



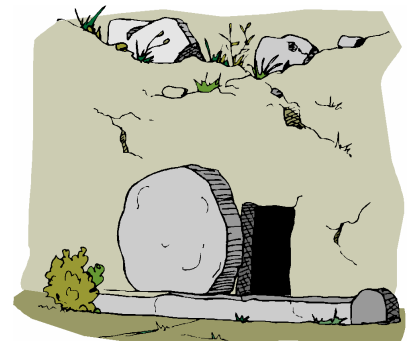
127 Not Out!

The last weekend of the month, **24/25th April**, will see us celebrating our **127th Church Anniversary**. We look forward to **Eric Scott** from Edinburgh joining us as our Guest Speaker for our *Saturday night rally* and *Sunday services*. We will be holding our customary *International Fellowship Tea* at 5.30pm on the Sunday, so perhaps we will invite him to share a little about life north of the Border with us!

Please remember all these activities in your prayers, and think how best you can use them to build up your own faith and help others find new life in Jesus, too.

David Hunt

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.



[1 Peter 1.3]

For further information visit our Church Website: www.gatesheadchurch.co.uk;
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