

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them... Luke 24.27.

So what happens to you when you die? I don't suppose it's really a question you Junior Stewards ask yourselves much, but we all do wonder from time to time. Is there any life at all after death? If there is, do we come back as ghosts to haunt those people who annoyed us? Are we reincarnated in other creatures - dung beetles if we've been bad, and, if we've been really, really good, a babe magnet like Brad Pitt? Is it just our soul that lives on after death? And anyway, how can we know what happens? No-one's ever died to come back to tell us.

Actually, that isn't true, is it? Isn't the whole point of Easter the fact that *Jesus* came back to tell us? We just read that sublime account in *Luke 24* of the risen Lord *Jesus* who joined Cleopas and his unnamed companion as they walked back to Emmaus on that first Easter Day. The two of them were clearly depressed and completely demoralised that the whole *Jesus-project* had gone horribly wrong. The bad guys had finally got him and had him crucified. There was talk from some women about an empty tomb, but basically it was all over, *Lk 24.17-24*... So this stranger, whom they did not recognise as *Jesus*, began to cheer them up. He tried to make sense of it all for them. How? By getting them back to the *Bible* (what the Jews call the Law of Moses, the Prophets and Writings, v27...)

*Jesus* took Cleopas and his companion back to the *Bible* to help them to understand all the crazy things of Good Friday and Easter Day. So let's take a leaf out of *Jesus'* book, as we also go back to the *Bible*. When people wonder what, if anything, happens when you die, they basically make it up, and

that's when they come up with all the nonsense theories. So let's get back to the Bible and see what God's *Word* tells us.

First and most importantly of all, the Bible tells us that there *is* life after death, *not* because it's a natural process, but because of *Jesus*. I want you to note that point. You might be shocked to learn that essentially the OT does not teach life after death. That's why the very conservative Sadducees in the NT didn't believe in it. There is life after death *only* because *Jesus* was raised from the dead. That is why Paul in 1 *Cor* 15.20 calls *Jesus* 'the *firstfruits* of those who slept'. So, if you find it *hard* to believe there's life after death, you are right to think that, because it is *unnatural* and *not* to be expected. There is only hope beyond the grave because *Jesus* was raised from the dead. That's why he said in *John* 14.19, 'Because *I* live, you shall live also'.

The *second* thing the Bible tells us is possibly the most difficult and the belief that has penetrated Christians the least - and it is the idea that we are raised as a *body*. It is a *physical* resurrection. Most people in our churches, if they believe in life after death, will say that it is our *spirit*, our *soul* which lives on, while the body is just a shell. Well, that very common belief is *not* found in the Bible. Actually it derives from the pagan Greek philosopher Plato. It was Socrates, about to commit suicide by taking hemlock, who looked forward to death, because his soul would finally be freed, like a bird being released from its cage. The soul is everything, and the body useless. I cannot stress enough that this very common belief is pagan and not what the Bible

teaches. The Bible teaches the resurrection of the *body*. Well, just look at these gospel accounts. Jesus did not appear to his disciples for 40 days after the resurrection as a gas, or a spirit, a ghost, or just a soul floating around, did he? When Mary saw Jesus in the garden, she might have thought he was the gardener, but what she saw was still a normal, physical body. When Jesus appeared to Doubting Thomas he was a body. When he walked with the two to Emmaus he was a body.

But, Brian, are you trying to tell us that our bodies go floating up to heaven? Surely not? And anyway, don't our bodies rot in the ground or end up as ash? Again, let's go back to the Bible, always the Bible. Turn to p1156, to the great chapter on life after death, 1 Cor 15. We have already noted v20 about Jesus being the *firstfruits* of those who have died ... Let's go on now to vv35-6... What Paul is trying to say is that we are raised from the dead a *body*, but - and this is absolutely crucial - a *changed* body, vv42-44a... Of course our earthly bodies don't float up to heaven. No-one is saying that, v50... But our bodies will be *changed* vv51-55...

So, let's go back to the resurrection appearances of Jesus himself. We have already seen that what they teach us is, first, that there *is* life after death. Jesus surprised his disciples by appearing to them after Easter. The tomb was empty. Second, he appeared to them as a *body*, not as a spirit, soul or ghost. And third, his body was clearly a *changed* body, as St Paul explained in 1 Cor 15. It was so changed that Mary did not recognise him, nor did Cleopas, or Peter out fishing. It was so changed that Jesus could come to the disciples

through locked doors, and yet he wasn't a ghost, because later Doubting Thomas actually *touched* his wounded hands and sides.

There was something new about the risen Jesus and something old. He still had his Calvary wounds. They finally recognised him from an old familiar act as he broke bread. Mary thought he was the gardener. There was nothing spooky about him, but he was clearly changed. Yet when he did something physical like calling her 'Mary' she recognised him.

I have used many times before the example of the caterpillar and the butterfly. One is changed into the other. The butterfly looks nothing like the caterpillar, and yet it is exactly the same DNA. The caterpillar actually dissolves into a liquid in the chrysalis, and then re-emerges, changed, and yet the same, as a beautiful butterfly. *We* know this happens, but does the *caterpillar* know it will happen? And would it know if we tried to tell it?

So there we have the fourth important teaching. Our bodies may be changed, but we are still the same DNA, still the same person. And that means our personality remains, and we shall recognise each other, just as eventually Mary, Peter, Cleopas recognised the risen Lord Jesus. And how *do* we recognise each other? By our bodies and gestures. So these resurrection appearances of Jesus tell us all we need to know about what happens when we die. Go back to the Bible, not to your own imaginations. Read the Bible accounts of Christ's resurrection appearances, because that is how it will be. Remember, Jesus is just the firstfruits of those who slept. As it was for Jesus, so it will be for us who trust in him.