

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 1 Cor 15.20.

The oven broke the other day, so I called in an electrician. He was a cheery chap. He noticed my clerical collar. Eventually he breezily said, 'I don't believe in God, what with the way the world is. Too much badness'. Should I say something? Where would I begin? Well, what would you have said? Perhaps you sympathise with him. That man was making a perfectly valid point: how can there be a good and powerful God in control when the world is as bad as it is?

My problem was not that I didn't know what to say to him but that the reply is so strange, so odd, that it would have taken too long, and no doubt he had other jobs to go on to. The fact is that the answer to the electrician's point is right here in the Bible. It's very strange to us, but it is mainstream Bible. It's only strange to us because our minds are formed by the world and not by the Word. Trying to understand the way the world is in terms of the world, is like trying to ask an alcoholic to explain alcoholism!

Well, let's enter the strange world of the Bible, and see what God's take is on it. Go right back to *Genesis*, to the Garden of Eden. It was Paradise. It was perfect. God meant life to be perfect for us for ever. But we goofed it. We thought we knew better than God who told us *not* to eat the fruit of the tree. Why not? What's wrong with that? We got kicked out of the perfect Garden of Eden, the world as God intended it for us. P6, *Gen 3.24* ... Notice the cherubim, the angels guarding the entrance back into the Garden of Eden. The gates of Paradise are now closed to us.

Adam and Eve preferred to listen to the serpent. If you prefer him, said God, then you stick with him. Let's do things our way, said Adam and Eve. Well, we've been doing things our way ever since, and look at the mess we've made.

Jesus was very clear. Many times he talked about the 'prince of this world'. Although God has made this world to be perfect, it has come under enemy occupation. For the moment the prince of this world was controlling things. And isn't that what my electrician friend concluded, even though he didn't know about the prince of this world? So, yes, even the Bible agrees 100% with the electrician. This is a mad, bad world. The prince of this world, Satan, is running things and is in people's minds at the moment. Why is it that so many people reject Jesus Christ? Again, the Bible has the answer. St Paul talks of 'the god of this age' who has blinded people. So, what the Bible says might sound strange, but it makes sense, doesn't it, and fits exactly the world described by the electrician. This mad, bad world is controlled by evil.

But whereas the electrician just left things there, the Bible goes on. The Bible says, Yes, this is a fallen world. Yes, we've been kicked out of the Garden of Eden. Yes, Satan, the prince of this world, is in control at the moment, but No, that's not where God is going to leave things. Why? because he is ultimately in control, and he is going to reclaim what is rightly his. He will be Lord. He will be sovereign.

Not so long ago there was a time when continental Europe had been taken over and had fallen under the complete control of Adolf Hitler. It had to be reclaimed. On 6 June, 1944, the

miracle of D-Day took place. The Allies succeeded in landing on the Normandy beaches. But there was a long slog ahead, as inch by inch the liberating Allies clawed their way to Berlin.

This world has been taken over by Satan, the prince of this world. Not in Normandy, but in Bethlehem, God made a bridge-head in enemy territory when he came in flesh as Jesus Christ. He came to take on Satan, the tyrant who had captured men's minds. He took him on at Calvary and, by being raised from the dead, defeated him.

Turn to p1089, *John* 19.41... Notice that we are back in a garden. Go down to 20.10-12... Notice the two angels. Do you remember the angels who blocked the way back to the Garden of Eden? And look at v15... Yes, she thought Jesus was the *gardener*! God has come in Jesus to get us back to the Garden of Eden. The electrician was right: this *is* an awful world, with its lies, and greed, its selfishness and cruelty. But he was wrong that God was not in control. Easter shews that he is absolutely in control. God was *not* going to allow Pilate, Caiaphas, the stupid, baying mob - all the stooges of Satan - to have the last word. They thought that by murdering Jesus that would be the end of him. On the third day, God had other plans. He raised Jesus from the dead to be alive for ever.

But even *this* is not the end of it. And this is a crucial point which most people in our churches miss. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is not the *end* of the process, but only the beginning. Turn to p1156, 1 Cor 15.20-26... Jesus is only the *beginning* of this process of renewal. He is only the *first-fruits* of those who have fallen asleep. Think again of

D-Day, of the landing behind enemy lines, and then advancing mile by bitter mile towards Berlin, liberating as they go all those who for years had been under Nazi oppression.

So it's not just Jesus who is being resurrected: it's the whole creation, this crazy world presently deluded by the god of this age, each of us who are in Christ. We shall *all* be resurrected, changed at the sound of the last trumpet.

As the Allies were advancing on Berlin, defeating the Nazi army as it went and liberating the people, so Jesus the resurrected Lord, is reclaiming his world. He is winning it back from Satan, because it *is* and always was his world, until usurped by the prince of this world. He is doing this precisely because he is Lord. That's what the electrician couldn't see. If God was God, surely the world wouldn't be the way it is. But God *is* God. He is Lord, and this is the way he is winning it back, and it all started at Easter, and it won't end until Satan is finally defeated, and Christ has brought about the new heaven and the new earth, prophesied in Rev 21.

Why don't people read the Book of *Revelation*? We studied it recently and found it thrilling. Many of our class have since discovered that in other churches, 'Oh we don't read that. Too difficult.' And so ministers fight shy of it, but they are cheating their congregations of the best message of all, the message of tremendous hope, that our loving and powerful God is in control and has a plan to bring us all back to the Garden of Eden where we were meant to be. We are being brought back to Eden, to the new heaven and earth, and it has already started on Easter Day - in a garden!