

FOCUS ON FAITH

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YOU'RE WORTH IT

For Christians this week – Holy Week – is the most significant of our 'festivals'. It's the time when we remember the ultimate reason for Jesus' life – His death and subsequent resurrection. Of course all the other events in Jesus' life are important too but without Easter they would have been pointless. In some ways Easter is a mystery – new life is born through a death – but it demonstrates the depth of love God has for us and the extent He was willing to go to express that love.

Unashamedly I want to declare that I believe the Bible. I admit I don't understand it all and there are many areas where I have questions. I recognise that logically to some people the Bible doesn't make sense but that's where faith comes in. I don't understand how computers work but as I type on this keyboard somehow the words appear on the screen in front of me and I have the faith to believe that when I press the print button, the thoughts I have formulated in my mind will appear on a piece of paper. Faith believes even when understanding is limited or incomplete.

One thing reading the Bible has taught me though is that throughout its pages from Genesis to Revelation, the desire in God's heart has always been to be in relationship with people. We are valuable to Him and no price was too great for Him to pay in His desire to maintain that relationship.

So often we just consider things from our point of view – what do I get out of this – but I'd like us to look at Easter from God's perspective this year. The Bible tells us that God made us in His own image, that human beings were the ultimate pinnacle in His creative achievements, that we were 'very good' – in fact perfect in every way. We were designed to walk in close relationship with Him, to enjoy His company and friendship participating with Him in the administration of the earth that was created for us.

Imagine His disappointment when that all went pear-shaped as mankind decided they knew best and rejected His companionship and decided to do their own thing. Yet it was still in God's heart to restore that relationship. Throughout the pages of the Bible we see time after time that God tried to repair the bond and on each occasion the result was the same – rejection.

Jesus told the story about a landowner who rented out his vineyard to tenants. At harvest-time he sent his rent-collectors to collect his share of the produce but the tenants beat them up, even killed some of them and eventually when the landowner sent his own son to them, he too was killed. It may have been an allegorical

story yet it was more than symbolic – it became reality and Easter is the fulfilment.

The new BBC drama – The Passion – being screened this week, looks at the Easter story from the viewpoint of the characters involved. We can blame Pontius Pilate, Judas Iscariot, the Jewish religious leaders or the crowds for what happened to Jesus but from God's perspective isn't the same kind of greed, selfishness, independence, lack of respect and broken commitments demonstrated by the tenants in Jesus' story replicated in the kind of lives we lead today?

The events of Easter may have happened 2,000 plus years ago but they are relevant to us today in that we still tend to exclude God from our everyday living, preferring to depend on our own abilities and wisdom instead of benefiting from the relationship God offers us.

At a time in his life that he declared himself to be an agnostic, Professor C.E.M. Joad, the British 20th century philosopher commented: "Man is nothing but fat enough for seven bars of soap, iron enough for one medium sized nail, sugar enough for 7 cups of tea, lime enough to whitewash a chicken coop, phosphorous enough to tip 2,200 matches, magnesium enough for one dose of salts, potash enough to explode one toy crane, sulphur enough to rid one dog of fleas".

Thankfully just before his death, Joad returned to his Christian faith and acknowledged there was much more to mankind than the sum of our constituent chemical components.

Easter may be mysterious, it challenges us mentally and emotionally and makes demands on our faith but through Jesus' death on a Cross and His resurrection we can be reconciled and restored in our relationship with God. It affirms the great truth that God loves us – enough to permit His Son to be sacrificed in order to re-establish our relationship with Him. Jesus Himself said, **"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends"**.

From God's perspective I believe Easter confirms, in the words of a well known advertising strap-line, **"You're worth it"**.

"Easter may be mysterious, it challenges us mentally and emotionally and makes demands on our faith...we can be reconciled and restored in our relationship with God"

If you would like to find out more about what Christians believe and why Easter is so important, log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk where you'll find information on local Churches together with contact details, plus information on activities and other resources.