

- Rev. Grant Mangold, www.RiversideChurchIowa.com

HARD TO BELIEVE - CRUCIFIXION ?

"Everyone is entitled to their own opinions - but not to their own facts." This truism resonates at Easter-time, doesn't it. Some say, what's up with these religious people who believe amazing things about crucifixion and resurrection? But, what's up with all those other people who don't believe - or care?

DON'T CARE? Either you haven't bothered to get informed, or you haven't paid enough attention to see the big deal for you. After all, there's work to be done, games, parties, videos, etc. Maybe you should reconsider. Read the gospel of John or Mark. You'll be gripped by the most unique life in all of human history - who loved you enough to die. He didn't claim to be just a great teacher, He was the Son of God, who came to die for sin. What will happen when you die without Jesus? Better think again!

DON'T BELIEVE? Then you believe something else. Unbelievers usually reject a caricature of what the Bible actually teaches, consciously or subconsciously. Few have ever actually read the Bible themselves, and remain uninformed. The historical evidence for the crucifixion of Jesus is one of the most compelling records in all of ancient history. If you reject Jesus and His purpose for living and dying, it's not for lack of evidence, but rather because you prefer to remain in your sins. Somehow, you believe you'll be ok when you die. Better think again!

CHRISTIANITY - the founder Jesus Christ died so you can live free from the power of sin and in heaven for ever. For generations, God had promised that the Messiah, the Christ, would come and pay for sin. In Acts 2:21 Peter declared, "**Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.**" Pointing to the crucifixion just 50 days earlier, he said "**Therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.**" The people were convicted of their sin and asked, "**What shall we do?**" Peter replied, "**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.**" Baptism is a sign of repentance and repent means turn around. The Bible calls you to believe, trust, put your faith in Jesus alone. Turn away from apathy and agnosticism and atheism and arrogance - and turn to Jesus, and be rescued, before it's too late for you!

OTHER RELIGIONS might include "some" truth, but that does not make them true. Mohammed says "you must die" if you reject his political-religious tenets. He claimed Jesus did not die on the cross. So you must try to obey Islam in the off-chance your good deeds will outweigh your bad. Unless you die in jihad.. Hinduism points to various "eternal duties" which might lead to a good reincarnation and perhaps merger with a supreme being. The "awakened one" of Buddhism says you should lead a good moral life and develop understanding and wisdom. Maybe you'll become a god or be absorbed into nirvana nothingness. Satan, the founder of Atheism and Secular Humanism, hisses "*has God really said?*" and rejects God's revelation, while telling you to just "be your own authority" on all matters of life and death. Judaism points to Abraham and Moses as fathers of faith. And the Bible says they were pointing to Jesus, the Savior.

"By works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a payment by His blood, to be received by faith." That's from Romans 3:20-26 - the passage Martin Luther considered the pivotal principle in all of Scripture.

Once you've trusted Jesus, you find it hard to believe what so many do actually believe - that they must, and can, somehow save themselves, against all reality and reason. Do you find it hard to believe that ONLY the God who created you can fix your brokenness? The remedy for sin must be perfect to satisfy His perfect holiness. Your efforts will never measure perfection. Only His Son, Jesus, the perfect God-Man, could pay the debt you owe, and erase your crimes, rebellion and enmity against God.

YOU DO BELIEVE? Our loving God gave His Son to rescue undeserving sinners, through the cross of Christ. Because Jesus died AND rose from the dead, His work saves all who put their trust in Him (Romans 4:22-25) - abundant life now and eternal life forever. More about this next week.

You are saved through repentance and faith in Jesus. And once saved, that's how you live too. Turning from sin, believing in Jesus, receiving Him as your Lord and Savior - trusting in Him with all your heart and mind and will - His blood washes away your sins. **Repent, believe, be saved - and live saved!**