

Outline the impact of the resurrection on the disciples | A1 Sample answer

Explain how the resurrection of Jesus influenced the first disciples' understanding of Jesus and their sense of community. 2009 HL Section B (b)

The arrest and death of Jesus was a shocking event for all of his followers. It is still confusing today why the people of Jerusalem would kill someone so important like Jesus. Indeed it is because he was important that he was persecuted, and to some level his disciples knew his actions would get him crucified. Although shocked by their teacher's death, they were somewhat prepared for it; they were not however, prepared for his resurrection. To have a friend and saviour die would in itself have a huge impact on the disciples, but for him to return from the dead, that had an even greater impact on them. We can learn from many sources how it impacted them, the most logical of which to begin with is The Bible, more specifically the Gospel accounts of the resurrection.

The Gospels cannot tell us exactly how Jesus rose from the dead as there were no eyewitnesses to the resurrection. The first person to see Jesus after he rose was Mary Magdalene. She was crying outside his tomb because his body was missing, at first when she heard him she thought he was the gardener. This is clearly recorded in John's gospel (John 20:13-16) She did not recognise him, he had undergone a transformation. His death had changed him and his resurrection also changed the disciple's view of life, they were no longer lost lambs without a shepherd, his resurrection reassured them. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians tells us that Jesus appeared to "*more than five hundred brothers and sisters*" including himself. From Paul's letters in the Gospel we know that Jesus' resurrection gave his disciples a purpose and mission, he gave them a new perspective on life and how to live it. Paul is a perfect example of how Jesus' resurrection changed people, he changed from one of the biggest persecutors of Christians to one of the most important converters to Christians.

Their New Understanding

After the death and resurrection of Jesus the disciples understood him in a completely different way. Now that the disciples fully understood who he was they could explain it to other people. Just like Jesus never explained God saying "God is this" or "God is that..." but rather used parables to explain certain traits which God has (e.g. kindness and love for everyone is seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan), the disciples looked for images and metaphors to describe Jesus. Previously the disciples could only describe what they saw Jesus do and explain his appearance and history, after the resurrection they explained his mission and purpose instead. They referred to Jesus as "*The light of the World*" (Matthew 5:14). When

trying to explain who Jesus was Paul wrote “*He is the image of the invisible God*” (Colossians 1:15). None of these images or metaphors fully capture the essence of who Jesus was but combined they give a good understanding of his message. These images try to show that Jesus was the highlight in God’s self-revelation, which is also known as the mystery of the Incarnation. Trying to explain this with words still is difficult today, I think the disciples did a good job of explaining it through these images and metaphors.

Their Sense of Mission and Community

Upon his resurrection, Jesus met with eleven disciples (Judas had hung himself), and gave them a mission. Matthew records his words accurately, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”(Matthew 28:19-20). The disciples did as they were told, uniting together to continue out the work which Jesus had begun before his death. This mission gave them focus and let them concentrate on what was really important. If this wasn’t enough, a sense of mission was renewed fifty days after Jesus’ Ascension, the Holy Spirit came and filled many followers. It gave them the ability “*to speak in other tongues*” which gave them the ability to fulfil their mission in other countries.

The followers of Jesus became more united after the resurrection, they prayed together, ate together, celebrated the Eucharist together and were happy together. In Acts 2 (42, 43) we read what they did “*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.*” They sold their possessions and shared what they kept. This sense of fellowship was a result of the impact the resurrection had on them. Paul encouraged this kind of a community among Gentiles and wanted the rich and the poor to live together in happiness and peace. It still can be seen today in certain organisations such as St Vincent de Paul where ordinary people give up their time and energy to help those worse off than themselves for the good of the community.

I wish that we could all do what the early Christians did, only take what we need and help those in need and then they would help us in our tough times. I’m aware that this does exist to a certain extent but in a world where we’re so connected we’ve never been more detached.

The early Christians understood Jesus’ significance a lot better after the resurrection event. This can be seen in the Gospels, in how they speak about his change. They noticed he was different after his resurrection just like they were after they understood it. This change in their understanding lead them to make new metaphors to explain his mission. Their images are still used today because they accurately highlight the importance of the mystery of the incarnation. Although some parts of Jesus’ life still remained a mystery to them, his resurrection gave them a new sense of mission, they felt like they had a purpose again. His resurrection gave them goals and aims in life, which helped them create a loving and inclusive community. The resurrection helped them understand Jesus, who he was and why he did what he did. Clearly the resurrection had a huge impact on their lives, and it amazes me how it continues to have a huge impact on the lives of Christians today.