

“The Reality of Christ’s Suffering”

Dear Antwort Mann,

I am writing to you because I feel confused, and because I am ashamed of myself. My friends and I were talking about Easter. One of them, who doesn’t go to church much, was saying how stupid Easter is. I told her she was totally wrong, and said that Jesus died for us so we could live forever in heaven. She said it wasn’t like really dying because he knew he was coming back in three days, so what’s the big deal? It wasn’t really the big sacrifice everyone makes it out to be. I told her the suffering was real, and that the pain was real. But I am really bummed to say that I didn’t have a good comeback for her. So now I feel like a dope. Can you help?
Signed, “Confused Christian”

Dear “Christian,”

First of all, you are to be commended for being brave enough to speak the Gospel to your friend. Many wouldn’t have had the courage to say that Jesus died for us to forgive our sins, or to continue to speak up about the reality of His pain and sacrifice. You did. Good for you!

Don’t underestimate what the Holy Spirit can do through your words, even though you feel they were inadequate. Because you stood firm, even though your friend seemed to dismiss everything you said, it is very likely that she will bring up the subject again – that is, if you continue being open and friendly to her. Believe me, the conversation isn’t over.

There are a couple of things you can do. You can either drop it for now and wait for your friend to bring up the subject again; or you can talk to her, one on one, and say that you’ve thought about what she said and asked a pastor for advice. That accomplishes two things: you will show her you listened to what she had to say and took her views seriously enough to do some more digging; and secondly, you show a humility that admits not knowing everything and an openness to find answers.

Now, based on what you’ve written, your friend doesn’t seem to be denying that Jesus died and rose again. She just doesn’t get the reality of His suffering. Maybe this analogy will help: Say I was arrested by mistake and sent to jail. I know that this will get straightened out in a few days and I will be released. Is what I experience in jail (even the really bad stuff that can happen) any less real? When I am finally released, will it be as if nothing had happened, or will my life be different because of it?

Even though Jesus was fully God, He was also fully human. Everything He experienced was as real as what you and I experience. When He underwent judgment for sins, not for His sins, but for all the sins of every single person in history, it was *real* judgment. His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His suffering on the cross, showed how real His agony was. And He didn’t *have* to go through any of it – He chose to do it for us. Just because that which He suffered would be “temporary” does not make it any less real, or any less a true sacrifice of love for all. And because He went through all this, death will also be “temporary” for us.

So, don’t feel bad about the conversation you had with your friend. Continue to pray for her, and be open to future opportunities to talk with her. Don’t think you have to answer every one of her questions perfectly, or argue her into heaven. Just keep the focus on Jesus, and His saving love for sinners, and trust the Holy Spirit to work through that Gospel. You’ll do just fine.

“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.” Romans 1:16

Best Regards, Der Antwort Mann