

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

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- I Cor.15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;
- 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.
- 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
- 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:
- 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:
- 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.
- 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.
- 8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.
- 9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.
- 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.
- 11 Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.
- 12 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?
- 13 But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:
- 14 And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.
- 15 Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.
- 16 For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised:
- 17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.
- 18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.
- 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.
- 20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

We are, of course, a few Sabbaths removed from Easter, and at Easter we are expected to preach about the Resurrection. But why do we preach so little about the most significant fact of history, if indeed it is fact? Why do we spend so much time on peripheral, secondary things and so little on the central? Why do we preach about the things that matter less and forget about the vital - until Easter Sunday arrives and everyone knows that the sermon will be about Easter? Someday I think I'll reverse things and preach about the Resurrection on the Sunday before Christmas, and about the Savior's birth on Easter Sunday. Why not?

In the *Zondervan Bible* we find this study:

“This is the classic chapter on the resurrection. In it Paul argues the whole subject of the resurrection from the dead--a teaching that some in the church at Corinth had been questioning (see v. 12).

How he had heard about this denial he does not say. But the question gives him an opportunity to bring again before the church the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of Christ, which, along with the death of Christ, he had faithfully communicated to them (vv. 1-3). He validates the historical reality of Christ's resurrection by citing eyewitnesses, including himself (vv. 4-11). He argues the validity of the resurrection of believers from the fact of the resurrection of Christ (vv. 12-19) and then shows that Christ's having been raised and being the first-fruits of the believing dead, guarantees the sequence of events at the second coming of Christ (vv. 20-28).”

Paul's major points in this argument to the Corinthian Christians would certainly not satisfy the skeptic philosophers of Greece, or, of Corinth for that matter. But for the Christian they are certainly relevant.

I. WITHOUT THE RESURRECTION THERE IS NO CHRISTIAN FAITH!

There are several different scenarios mentioned by the critics of Christianity to try to refute the reality of the Resurrection. Here are some of them:

1) *The Swoon Theory*-This theory holds that Jesus was never really dead, that He had just fainted under His heavy burdens that day, and that when He was placed inside the cool tomb He awoke and pushed back the stone. This theory fails because it leaves out how seriously Jesus was wounded with the spear that pierced His side, not to mention the 39 stripes He received. Pilate himself examined the body and 'marveled that He was so soon dead.'

2) Then there is *The Fraud Theory*, a theory that the disciples slipped to the tomb at night and stole His body away to another burying place. This is just the theory that the Jews persuaded the guards to tell the Roman authorities. Furthermore Christ's disciples were heartbroken at His death, and had no reason to desecrate the body. Why move a dead body from one tomb to another to deceive the authorities? The disciples believed He was thoroughly dead also, and were astounded when they heard that He had risen. The disciples were not frauds, deceivers, or thieves.

3) *The Mistake Theory*-This view says that the women made a mistake and went to the wrong tomb that early morning. But they had just visited the tomb Saturday. People do not forget where a loved one is buried.

4) *The Vision Theory*-says that the disciples expected Him to rise, and hearing the report from the hysterical women, they had hallucinations of Him. This view forgets that they did not expect Him to rise from the dead. No one ever had, and they knew it! Moreover this group-hallucination theory leaves out the fact that He appeared to individuals as well as groups.

5) *The Modern Theory*-Bultmann and others believe that there are two separate realms - faith and reality. They maintain that it really doesn't matter if He really arose from the dead. What matters they argue is that the disciples believed He arose. The reality of it doesn't matter to people of faith.

Maybe the people in Corinth had the same view. "It doesn't matter if it's true or not. What matters is if you believe it happened."

Paul totally refuted that idea when said, "If Christ be not risen our preaching is vain and your faith is vain." Whatever the circumstances, Christ is risen and your faith is not vain. An evangelist told the following story in one of his campaigns. He said, "I have a friend who during the depression lost a job, a fortune, a wife, and a home, but tenaciously held to his faith -- the only thing he had left.

One day he stopped to watch some men building a stone church. One of them was chiseling a triangular piece of rock. 'What are you going to do with that?' asked my friend. The workman said, 'Do you see that little opening way up there near the spire? Well, I'm shaping this down here so that it will fit up there.' Tears filled the eyes of the heart-broken man as he walked away. It seemed that God had spoken through the workman to explain the ordeal through which he was passing."

Perhaps you have recently suffered a great loss. Or maybe you are experiencing physical or emotional pain. The outward man seems to be "perishing." Yet, if you know the Lord as your Savior, you need not despair. All these things are under the loving hand of your heavenly Father, who is using them to prepare you for heaven. Christ is risen! Your faith is not vain.

(Luke 18:8 KJV) Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

If Christ be not risen our preaching is vain and **your faith is vain!**

II. IF CHRIST BE NOT RISEN, YOU ARE STILL UNFORGIVEN!

1 Cor 15:17 And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; **ye are yet in your sins.**

I read the story recently of how Louis XII of France treated his enemies after he ascended to the throne. Before coming to power, he had been cast into prison and kept in chains. Later when he did become king, he was urged to seek revenge but he refused. Instead, he prepared a scroll on which he listed all who had perpetrated crimes against him. Behind every man's name he placed a cross in red ink. When the guilty heard about this, they feared for their lives and fled. Then the king explained, "The cross which I drew beside each name was not a sign of punishment, but a pledge of forgiveness extended for the sake of the crucified Savior, who upon His cross forgave His enemies and prayed for them."

Are you unforgiven this morning? I watched a movie by that name a few nights ago. What a terrible thing it would be to feel the burdens of my sins and iniquities again. I remember well how I felt when I was forgiven. For the first time in my life I felt free from sin, free from guilt, free from bondage to this vile body and this vile world. Since

that experience of salvation I have never felt that terrible bondage again. Praise God! I would never want to go back to that life again. One day with the Lord is better than a thousand years without Him. When I die I know that I can die with grace and thankfulness that I die forgiven by the grace of God! Place that on my tombstone--
Forgiven by the grace of God!

Yet if Christ be not risen your faith is vain and you are still in your sins. It takes a living Christ to forgive you even if the dying Christ did pray 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do.'

Romans 5:1 declares, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

But again-1 Cor 15: 18 Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.

Can you fathom the great saints of God not being forgiven and not being in Heaven? Can it be that our fathers and mothers who died in the faith of Jesus Christ simply perished? Can it be that that dear mother, that priceless father, that precious daughter just perished into dust and the personality so precious did not survive death? Did our parents live with the illusion of unforgiveness and simply die never to be again? The terrible answer to those questions is **YES! IF CHRIST BE NOT RISEN FROM THE DEAD!**

But put those thoughts to rest dear friends-Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed! Proof of that is that you are forgiven of your sins.

III. FURTHERMORE, IF CHRIST BE NOT RISEN FROM THE DEAD, REASONS PAUL, THERE REALLY IS NO FUTURE FOR ANY OF US.

1 Cor. 15:19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

A Hallmark card says, "Sometimes we have to let go of the past in order to enjoy the present, and be able to dream of the future."

But if the past is futile and our loved ones simply perished like the animals of the earth, as some believe they do, and if the present is all we have, then there is no hope, there is no future. A great friend of mine once said, "If this is all there is, I've been cheated."

C.H. Spurgeon, commenting on death for the Christian, observed that it's wonderful to "have the tenement gradually taken down, and yet not to feel any trouble about it, but to know that you are in the great Father's hands, and you shall wake up where old age and infirmities will have passed away, and where, in everlasting youth, you shall behold the face of Him you love."

That is a wonderful hope to have, but it is based upon the faith that Jesus rose from the dead and that when I die I will awake in His likeness.

* Isaac Asimov tells the story of a rough ocean crossing during which a Mr. Jones became terribly seasick. At an especially rough time, a kindly steward patted Jones on

the shoulder and said, "I know, sir, that it seems awful. But remember, no man ever died of sea-sickness." Mr. Jones lifted his green countenance to the steward's concerned face and replied, "Man, don't say that! It's only the wonderful hope of dying that keeps me alive."

Well, as believers we do have a wonderful hope ahead of us even at death. Just the thought of that first glimpse of heaven, keeps us motivated to live for our savior.

The importance of the Resurrection is that there is a future and that hope is real and will one day be fulfilled.

Other men see only a hopeless end, but the Christian rejoices in an endless hope.
-- Gilbert Beenken

IV. BECAUSE OF THE RESURRECTION WE HAVE LIFE.

1 Cor 15: 20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

21 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

In all the cases where Paul says "If Christ be not risen" he was using rhetorical statements. Paul had himself met the risen Christ. He knew that Christ was risen. Why? Because the risen Christ had appeared to him and given him Life with a capital L. Can you imagine a Paul without a living Lord and Savior? I cannot.

Nor can I imagine some of you without the living Christ. The reason you are who you are is because Christ has entered your heart and given you Life. You have been made alive in Christ.

Someone said,

Man can give medicine when sickness comes,
Food when hunger comes,
Help when weakness comes,
Love when loneliness comes.
But when death comes, man can give
Only sympathy, only compassion,
Never the gift of life.
Only God can do that.

In Christ, we have the gift of Eternal Life while we live, and we have Eternal Life when we die.

Christ died and rose again to give us this precious gift.

When we die we will not remain in the grave. Our bodies shall be resurrected when Christ returns.

Christ died for our sins; but He arose. The importance of the resurrection is this: because He lives, I will also live.

It was June 18, 1815, the Battle of Waterloo. The French under the command of Napoleon were fighting the Allies (British, Dutch, and Germans) under the command of Wellington. The people of England depended on a system of signals to find out how the battle was going. One of these signal stations was on the tower of Winchester Cathedral.

Late in the day it flashed the signal: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N- - - D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D- -." Just at that moment one of those sudden English fog-clouds made it impossible to read the message. The news of defeat quickly spread throughout the city. The whole countryside was sad and gloomy when they heard the news that their country had lost the war. Suddenly the fog lifted, and the remainder of the message could be read. The message had four words, not two. The complete message was: "W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N- - -D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D- - T-H-E- - -E-N-E-M-Y!" It took only a few minutes for the good news to spread. Sorrow was turned into joy, defeat was turned into victory!

So it was when Jesus was laid in the tomb on the first Good Friday afternoon. Hope had died even in the hearts of Jesus' most loyal friends. After the frightful crucifixion the fog of disappointment and misunderstanding had steeled in on the friends of Jesus. They had "read" only part of the Divine message. "Christ defeated!" This morning it is my great privilege to preach to you the Resurrection! He is risen! He Lives! Your faith is not vain! Our preaching is not vain! We are forever forgiven! Because He lives, we Live also! Because He lives, there is Hope!