

IF CHRIST DID NOT RISE

I Corinthians 15:12 - 20

Our passage this ~~morning~~ begins with a most startling statement, one that the Apostle Paul makes without condition or apology. Verses 12 - 15:

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."

On Easter Sunday, and on every other Sunday, our Sunday ~~morning~~ services here celebrate this one central fact: God raised Jesus from the dead!

Here is the Apostle Paul's opinion of that central fact: Without a risen Christ, everything I say here is empty preaching. Without a risen Christ, our faith is false. Without a risen Christ, our overall state is one of abject misery.

Paul did not think for a single moment that Christianity could offer mankind anything worthwhile if the resurrection could be disproved.

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Now, when Paul wrote these words, he was not standing on the same ground we are today. He wrote these words about 50 years after Jesus' death. ↑ The Gospels we have today were not yet published, but men had carried the story of Jesus throughout much of the Roman Empire.

But, now, almost 2000 years have gone by. Our text is no longer just an argument: it is now a roaring shout of victory! The thrust of the statement is reversed. Paul says that if Christ did not rise, then preaching is vain. But the past 2000 years of preaching have not been vain, therefore Christ has been raised!

Verses 16 and 17 say:

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."

Paul says that if Christ has not been raised, then faith is vain. But faith has been fruitful and has greatly multiplied over the past 2000 years, therefore Christ has been raised!

Verses 18 and 19 say:

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."

Paul says that if Christ has not been raised, then we are of all men most miserable. But this is not true! Over the past 2000 years, we have marched with banners flying and songs of gladness on joyful lips, even in the midst of the greatest suffering, therefore Christ has been raised!

According to what Paul has written here, the victory of preaching, the fruitfulness of faith, and the joy of the Church are the surest and most conclusive evidence of Christ's resurrection.

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But, even though we have these 2000 years of added testimony, I want to go back and see these words with the eyes of those early Christians in Corinth who were the first to read them.

If Christ had not been raised, what would it have meant to these first readers? Was Paul right when he said their faith would have been vain? Was he right when he said that a terrible sadness would have descended upon them, and made them the most miserable people in the world? I believe he was completely right!

If Jesus Christ had not risen, what could we say about Jesus Himself? First of all, we would have to say that all of his greatest claims were totally worthless! In complete sincerity, He had set His heart upon a very worthwhile endeavor, but He was completely unable to accomplish it!

I'm not saying His claims were false. I'm not saying that He did not mean them. I'm not saying that He did not fully

intend to carry them out. But I do say they were worthless!

Jesus said to the crowds when they criticized him for driving the moneychangers out of the temple, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The scripture tells us He was speaking of His own body. If Christ was not raised, this claim proved untrue!

When some cynical seekers asked Him for a sign, He said, "There shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet...For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

On another occasion, in front of a critical multitude, He declared, "I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father."

None of these claims proved true unless He rose again. If you deny the resurrection, then His life was taken from Him by uncaring, mocking Roman soldiers who overpowered His weakness and nailed Him to the cross, and He never did take that life again if He never rose from the dead.

If I had been there; if I had waited through the three long days and nights; if I had awakened on that first Easter morning to find the seal still on the tomb and the Roman soldiers still at their posts; then I would have had to walk away with agony in my heart.

I would have had to say, "He meant to rise again, but He failed. He was just as frail and weak as I am. He was overpowered by death just as I will also someday be overpowered by death. He has lost! Since He did not rise, all the wonderful and glorious claims He made are worthless. I was a fool to follow Him!"

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If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead, what would it have meant to history. When he was crucified, all his disciples scattered and went into hiding. They would have never dared mention His name in public again - unless He came back from the dead! There would be no Christianity today. There would be no Church.

Christ's message was a beautiful ideal, but it died with

Him. It was loving and beautiful and glorious. It gripped the hearts of a few followers. But now it's gone! He is dead. He is sealed up in the tomb behind that huge rock. Everybody who listened to him is scurrying back to their farms; back to their fishing nets. Oh, the shame and disgrace of having been foolish enough to follow such a man. No matter how good He was, He is still just another failure!

If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then His beautiful dream was just that: nothing but a dream. The dreamer has been murdered and His dream with Him: that is the only meaning of the cross, **IF JESUS DID NOT RISE.**

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We talk about the atonement: Jesus has atoned for our sins. But where is the atonement if Jesus has died and still abides in death? There is no atonement if Jesus did not rise from the dead! If Jesus did not rise, then sin has won. He hated sin. He claimed to be sinless. But sin has overpowered Him and put Him in the grave. How can He break my chains of sin? How can He set me free? **How can He blot out my transgressions?**
Now, if He is still in that grave,

If Jesus did not rise, preaching is empty. If He did not rise, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins, held by them, bound by them, overpowered by them, damned by them!

If Jesus did not rise, then the doctrine of justification is ridiculous nonsense. If He did not rise, there is no certainty of life after death; there is no certainty of Heaven.

If Jesus did not rise, the Church could never have existed. The Church consists of people who have seen the vision of perfect life in Jesus and have received the Holy Spirit who empowers them to grow towards that perfect life as their ultimate goal. **IF JESUS NEVER ROSE, THEN NONE OF THAT COULD HAVE EVER HAPPENED.**

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If Jesus did not rise, I can not admire Him or His life at all! "Why not?" you may ask, "Haven't you already admitted that He may have meant well." Think again. Jesus made claims to a relationship with God that no man had ever laid claim to. If men murdered Him and He remained dead, then He was nothing more than any other man, and all His claims were false!

If Jesus was not the Son of God, then He had no modesty, He had no meekness, He had no truth in Him. Jesus was either the Son of God or the most awful liar and deceiver that ever walked

the Earth.

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But, if Jesus did not rise, then what did happen? The very fact that the Church exists proves that something happened. The Bible tells the story of Christ's death and resurrection. You say the story is not true? You say He never rose? You say He never appeared in the upper room while the doors were closed, He never stood by the shore and built a fire and prepared breakfast for cold, tired fishermen? You say Mary never saw Him, but only a vision of her own imagination?

Tell me, then, what did happen? I've heard it said that the whole thing was a fraud, that the disciples invented the story to save themselves. But, from all earthly standpoints, the story ruined them. If they had given it up, they could have saved themselves.

Later, in Rome, all the Christians had to do to avoid the lions was to renounce Christ. Why didn't they? Why did they continue to declare, "He is alive!" in the face of certain death?

I cannot believe that for 2000 years men and women have continued to suffer pain, imprisonment, loss, agony, and death for nothing more than a lie. You cannot legitimately deny the resurrection unless you can otherwise account for the change it has wrought in the hearts of men. When you tell me that the story of the resurrection is a fraud, a fraud that made men pure and strong and full of love and joy, I find your charge absurd!

If you say that it was only a vision, that the disciples saw what they expected to see, the facts are against you. They did not expect to see Him. They were thunderstruck when He appeared.

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I end where Paul ended, with verse 20:

20 "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."

The testimony of the disciples is the first line of proof. The testimony of Paul is proof. And the Church today is the capstone to the proof: its very existence testifies to the resurrection. I am a proof: Jesus lives in me and has changed

my life. And if you know Jesus, you are a proof: Jesus lives in you and has changed your life.

Christ is risen! Our preaching is not vain! Your faith is not fruitless! We are not miserable! In the midst of all our sufferings, our joy is overwhelming: THE TOMB IS EMPTY!

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah! Amen!

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